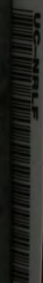

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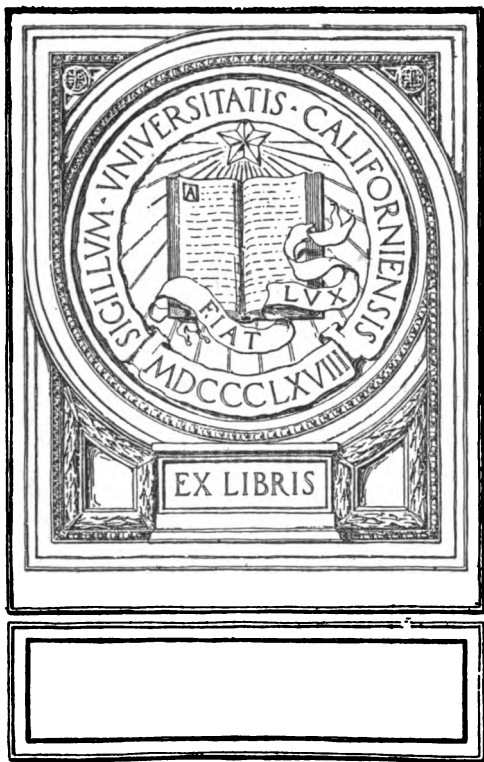
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LOVE
OF
DEAD





THE SUN OF THE DEAD

By the same Author

**THAT WHICH
HAPPENED**

THE SUN OF THE DEAD

By
IVAN SHMELOV
"



Translated from the Russian by
C. J. HOGARTH

THE
SUN OF
THE DEAD

1927

London & Toronto

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INTRODUCTION

THOUGH differing greatly from Chekhov in genius, Shmelov to-day is in the same position as Chekhov was twenty years ago as regards literary reputation. That is to say, he has achieved Continental fame but is little known in England.

The Sun of the Dead, however, was written less for fame or fortune than for the purpose of presenting the civilised world with a truthful, first-hand picture of what was done in the Crimea during and after the Russian Revolution by, or at the behest of, men few of whom, though claiming to act in the name of the Russian people, belonged to that people, and fewer still to that people's workers.

For over thirty years Shmelov studied the Russian masses—worked with, talked with, lived with them until he had come to know them with an intimacy of understanding such as few members of the educated classes of his country have ever achieved. In politics neither an opponent of nor an apologist for the imperial régime, he recognised that régime's many good points and abhorred its not inconsiderable vices. Never, however, did he advocate revolution by force, or believe freedom of the people to be attainable through mediæval Mongolian methods, or through the establishment of an administrative system such as the present one, a system run in shoddy, anachronistic, ineffectual fashion by a congerie of chinovnik-tsars temperamentally, intellectually and socially unfitted to rule a modern state, as products of the mentality which may be described as conceived of materialism, reared upon vanity, tutored by Marx, and finished off by Lenin. The subjects of their usurpation they exploit on Pinchbeck-Oriental lines. The subjects of other Governments they seek to exploit on the lines of a confidence-trick syndicate.

So, after years of studying the Russian masses, Shmelov has seen a revolution made for those masses much as Marx advised that a revolution should be made for the masses of England.

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To this result various historical, racial, social and political factors contributed—not the least of those factors being the centuries-long ill-treatment of Russia's serfs by Russia's Tsars (especially by Peter the Great) and Russia's ruling classes. But it was in the Crimea, above all, that Shmelov was enabled to see the Marxian ideal furthered through wholesale massacre and despoilment, for there over 120,000 Russian men, women and children were done to death for the purpose, and one of the richest and fairest of Russia's provinces was so absolutely devastated that the surviving population were left to subsist upon acorn-meal, chopped straw bread, roots, wild berries, rats, cats, lizards, or anything else that could be made to replace the food which "the People's Government" constantly promised and never provided. In the Crimea, indeed, as elsewhere, the Communists served Marx as once the Children of Israel served Jehovah in Palestine. And when the 120,000 obstructors (preponderantly working-folk) had been removed from the path of freedom the native survivors waned thin, and the imported and other commissars waxed fat. Shmelov gives not a few instances of such commissars' acts of bestial cruelty and lust. And if ever protests were raised by the hapless victims, and starving workers presented themselves before a commissar to intimate to him that the spectacle of his licensed gorgings and guzzlings was a poor substitute for the filling of an empty stomach, the commissar would either respond with violence or once again repeat some such rubbish as that "the People's Government" was building gigantic aeroplanes for the revictualling of the Crimea, and that if the protesters would wait a little longer they and their friends would receive not only all the necessities of life, but also all the luxuries. And, needless to say, no aeroplane of the sort ever appeared, and the protesters and their friends continued either to starve to death, or to commit suicide (self-immolation was a common, and a horrible, form of this), or to disappear within a brain-littered cellar, or to be taken out to sea and drowned. Many nauseous things were done during the Russian Revolution, and have been done since, and are being done now. But the most nauseous thing

of all was, and is, the vulgar, cynical, ostentatious luxury indulged in by commissars and other persons in authority in the face of the hungry masses.

In this infamy, in, worse still, this deception of a people, the leading spirit was, as regards the Crimea, Bela Kun, one of those creatures which a violent social upheaval seldom fails to throw up to the surface and leave battenning upon the surface's floating débris. Earlier the same agitator had played a similar rôle in Hungary. Said a dying blacksmith to Shmelov: "Who is this man? Where has he come from? He knows nothing of our ways, and is robbing the churches." But at least the Russian Revolution's engineers knew enough of Russia's ways to take advantage to the full of Russia's weaknesses—of her fatalism and inertia and political disunion and civic immaturity, of, in short, the whole psychological legacy bequeathed to her from centuries of serfdom, and from the period of political-mental arrestment through repeated shocks of Asiatic invasion. For if, in 1917, the masses of Russia had been less socially and politically divided, and unschooled in economics and the duties of a citizen, and exposed to the dangers of credulity, and inured to life under successive benevolent or malevolent tyrannies, the weed of Bolshevik Communism would never have taken such root as not speedily to have withered again when the sun of a healthy public opinion asserted itself. Popular ignorance, political discord, social apathy—but, above all, popular ignorance: here we have the three elements most vitally necessary for the growth of Communism as presented by Lenin and his following. And that is why every attempt to raise a really full crop of the weed in the British Empire will eventually fail. Within that Empire the Communist orator may inculcate "class consciousness"—which is individual self-consciousness communicated to the fools of one class by the knaves of another; but only an auserine minority will start running about with flapping wings and outstretched necks, and screech that the fox has arrived to redeem the poultry-yard.

The author did not write *The Sun of the Dead* whilst he was actually living in the Crimea, although the wording of it

is, for the most part, in the present tense. So to have done might have cut the slender hair which held in suspense the Damocletian sword, rather the Damocletian revolver-trigger, of Bolshevik "justice." But so soon after the author's escape from the country was the book written that he still had floating before his eyes the Terror's sights, echoing in his ears the Terror's sounds, lingering in his nostrils the Terror's savour. Nor are his pictures the less graphic in that sometimes he employs the suggestive method rather than the direct. "The destroyer came sweeping in towards the Yalta wharf, and as it did so something told me that the seven captives huddled in that cellar also knew that the vessel was come, and the reason of her coming,"—a haunting suggestion of human anguish and suspense. Moreover, the horrors of the Crimean Terror stand out the more poignantly for Shmelov's many descriptions of the scenic beauties amongst which they were enacted. Yet no one who did not actually live through that Terror can adequately realise the meaning of an existence of daily, hourly expectation of arrest and violent death, or, at best, of slow and sure starvation.

The Russian Revolution was manufactured in the name of the people; and, as not infrequently happens in such cases, the people, in the true and good sense of the word, has been the one popular element to derive thence no benefit, but, on the contrary, to lose benefits already possessed. The elements which have benefited by the Revolution have been, firstly, the country's foreign undesirables, and, secondly, the dregs of the native population. Hence, in this book, Shmelov brushes aside all humbug on the subject, all the flood of humbug which has swirled around the Bolshevik movement as it has swirled around no other revolutionary movement within the limits of recorded history, and calls things by their real names, and describes persons as they are, and not as they and their interested friends present them. He cares nothing for the stock phrase, for face-saving, for poses and platitudes, for political insincerity, for the sophistries of the wealthy Socialist and his apologists, for the gramophonic chatter of the debating-society jackanapes, for the prating of the man

who is against all war except war in its most horrible form, for the visionary whom a simple trick can lead to bleat about the boiling of "exhibition" milk for "exhibition" infants, and to pooh-pooh all mention of earlier boilings of naval officers, and for the "seeker after the truth" who can go into rhapsodies when shown a school copybook which is alleged to have had "Once we were slaves. Now we are free," pasted over "God save the Tsar!" when no such copybooks at all existed in the Tsar's time, and has "inspected a prison thoroughly," when all the time he has never even been allowed to enter its lower portions, and that he has had private interviews with prisoners in the land *par excellence* of caves-dropping, and that the Bolsheviks have organised splendid prison workshops when in reality those workshops were instituted by the Tsarist Government, and have vastly deteriorated since, and, in short, that he has not been barked back into the flock whenever he has tried investigation on his own account. No, to Shmelov a Jewish bourgeois doctrinaire is not a "son of the people," nor an international agitator by profession a "lover of the people," nor a coarse, sensual boor a "protagonist of freedom"—save for, of course, freedom as that boor specifically understands the word. And, above all, he shows once more how true it is that, just as the sheep at bay may be a dangerous animal, so the doctrinaire at play can run amok with destructive effects—the spur in the one case being frenzied fear, and in the other frenzied egotism—and, having destroyed in actuality, and being incapable of construction save in theory, leave the way open for the hooligan and the ape.

Nevertheless, says Shmelov, Russia will one day rise again, since no nation of her spiritual strength and physical fortitude has ever remained permanently prostrate. And certainly there may be cited as evidence the fact that, from the United States in the West to Japan in the East, the civilised nations of the world have sloughed or rejected Bolshevistic Communism, and forced its advocates to turn to the backward nations, and to the semi- or the wholly barbarous.

C. J. HOGARTH.

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THE SUN OF THE DEAD

MORNING

THROUGH troubled slumbers I hear, on the other side of the mud-built wall, a heavy tread, and the snapping of a dry twig.

It is Tamarka again! Yes, Tamarka is stretching herself over my fence; Tamarka, the beautiful white and red-spotted cow which used to be the sole support of the family on the hill above us. Once she produced three quarts of milk a day—milk warm, and frothing, and redolent of the living animal, milk which, on reaching the boiling-point, had specks of fat floating on its surface, and foamed, and——

But I must not think of such things. What has made me do it?

Another day has dawned, and all night I have been dreaming a dream so strange that nothing in real life could resemble it.

For months past I have been dreaming that dream. But how come I to have been dreaming a dream so gorgeous in its setting, a dream in which I see suites of thousands of luxurious rooms?—though not of rooms, really, so much as of halls taken from the *Arabian Nights*, halls wherein lustres of an unearthly blue glimmer upon tables heaped with unearthly flowers. Through those halls I wander and wander. I seem to be seeking someone, but I know not whom. And as, sadly, fearfully, I gaze through the halls' gigantic windows, I see outside them gardens garnished with grass plots and green parterres, so that the gardens look like old-time pictures. And somehow the sun which is shining upon those gardens is not the sun known to us here, but a sun of a luminance as submarine regions may be luminous, or as metal gleams when white-hot. And everywhere the garden has unearthly looking

shrubs in it—tall, non-terrestrial, white-coned lilacs, resplendently blooming, non-terrestrial rose-bushes. And through the halls people dressed in white are walking. Lifeless faces those people have—people they are such as figure on *ikons*, and they keep gazing through the windows exactly as I do. And something tells me—I realise the fact with a thrill of horror—that all of them have had something terrible done to them, that all of them have passed through agony, and now stand apart from life, and have ceased to be part of life, yet still are compelled, like myself, to perambulate those painfully sumptuous rooms, and are finding the process as irksome and humiliating as I am.

Always I awake from that dream with a sense of relief. . . .

Tamarka? Tamarka's milk? On that milk reaching the boiling-point, it used to—

But I *must* not think of milk! Then of what else shall I think? Let me reckon up my stores of food. Still I have a few days' flour left (hidden away in a corner, since in these times it is dangerous to have flour exposed—men might arrive and seize it any night), and a few green tomatoes destined, possibly, to turn red, and some dozens of pods of Indian corn, and a pumpkin just about to set. But even upon these it will not do to reckon.

How I long to smoke! And though all my body is aching, still I must scour the ravines once more with my axe, and lop off here a root, and there a billet of oak. For the daily routine never varies, but is always the same. . . .

Tamarka? She is standing beside my fence still, and presently I hear a blowing of nostrils, then a thrusting aside of twigs. Heavens! She is looking at my almond-tree! Next she will come round to the gate, and try to prise up its latch with her muzzle. But luckily I have placed some additional stakes there. Last week she came when everyone was asleep, bent back the gate until it stood unhinged, entered and devoured half the garden. And with reason—for she too is hungry. On the hill the last morsel of hay has been consumed, and the last blade of grass become scorched. Nothing now remains there save some stones and a clean-picked horn-

beam, and if she would obtain any food she must wander, day and night, through rough gully and impenetrable thicket.

What is the date? The month is August, but what is the day of the month? No matter! Dates are no longer any concern of mine, and I no longer need a calendar—to the prisoner condemned for life all dates seem the same. Yesterday, just as I was cutting off a little raw, green apple, I heard a bell in the neighbouring town proclaim a festival. And, suddenly remembering that the festival must be the Feast of the Transfiguration, I brought the apple home, and laid it carefully on the verandah, since I had an idea that the simple fact of having placed it there just on the eve of the Transfiguration would enable me thenceforth to reckon the days, the weeks, the months, and the—

What was I speaking of? Oh, of to-day. Well, that day must be begun. I must wrest from me all thoughts, and plunge into a round of pettinesses sufficiently numerous to enable me mechanically to say by nightfall, "I have killed another day."

Wearily, like a prisoner sentenced for life, I don my clothes, those clothes which the thickets, as I quested firewood through them, have reduced almost to rags. And as I dress I wonder why so constantly I feel impelled to heap up fuel, and yet more fuel, against the winter-time. Why do I do it? I do not know. Perhaps to kill thought. Once I dreamed of becoming Robinson Crusoe. Now I have become Robinson Crusoe in very truth, or worse, since at least *he* had hope to fall back upon, and might at any moment see a speck show upon the horizon, whereas for us no such speck will ever appear, and no such speck even exists to appear. Thus I shall have to quest for firewood to the end of my days, so that when winter has begun to draw in we may spend the long evenings gazing into a stove-panel in which visions of the past glow, flicker and expire. For weeks past a pile of faggots has been arising in my forecourt, and slowly drying, yet never can I rid myself of the feeling that more yet, and more yet, eternally, is wanted. But there is the consolation that its chopping into lengths will employ the winter days, whilst in any case it would be foolish not to use for the purpose the season when the weather

is fine and warm, and one can walk barefooted, or shod only with slippers. Soon enough will winds be raging from off Chatyr Dag, and rains discharging their volleys, and the ravines have become impassable.

So I don my clothes. How they will make the old clo' dealer laugh when he comes to stuff them into his sack! But what do such dealers care what they do? Such dealers would grab even a human soul, and sell it for a few groats, or boil down human bones for glue, or compound human blood into soup cubes. Well, at present those dealers, those life-renewers, must have got a plethora of material to their hand. Even now they are working away with their iron crocks!

My rags, then?—I have spent the whole of the last few years in those rags, and it is upon them that my dying glance shall fall. No, never shall they go to the rag-picker, but, rather, be laid upon the ground and left to dissolve under sunshine and rain and wind, until either they have become one with the leaves, or birds have taken them for nesting material.

Next I open the shutters. What a glorious morning it is! An August morning on the Crimean littoral means a sunny, blinding resplendence and glare that simply cuts into, beats into, one's eyes, almost hurts them.

But as one opens the door one's haggard features also are bathed in freshness, a freshness drawn from fading night by the sun's resurrection, a freshness of mountain and valley and forest, a freshness charged with Yalta's peculiar rasp of wooded cleft and ringed meadow-land, a freshness left by the night wind's last faint ripple before daylight reverses the air, and a breeze comes blowing in from the sea.

O lovely morning, hail!

Below, the small patch of my vineyard is cool, damp and shady still, but on the opposite slope the sunlight is turning the loam to the reddish-brown of new copper, and tipping my planting of young pear-trees with rubies. Later those pear-trees will don their heavy, pendent trinket-fruit, their "Marie Louise" burden. And then their beauty will have come to transcend even the loveliness of now. Yet it is

nervously that I scan them. I fear to find that not all of them are still standing. However, they have weathered the night successfully. Not of greediness is my solicitude for my young pear-trees born. It is born of the fact that their fruit, when ripened, will represent for us a portion of our bread of subsistence.

And hail to you also, ye mountains!

Seaward stands Kastel, that hill like a fortress. Guardian of vineyards seemingly singing a morning hymn of praise, Kastel once gave us golden sauterne, the brighter portion of the mountain's blood, and red bordeaux, its darker portion—the latter smelling as though compounded of prunes, morocco leather and Crimean sunshine. And the more richly of wine did Kastel yield in that its reflected heat preserved the neighbouring vineyards from night frost.

And to the right of Kastel stands pink-capped, ramparted Kushkaia, with shady slopes all cloaked with forest save where they break off into a bare, precipitous, placard-like face. It is a face observant of, registrative of all things. And ever an invisible hand traces upon it figures. Its distance from here is several versts. Yet apparently one could touch it with a finger, or reach it just by crossing that glen.

An invisible road traverses Kastel's forests, ravines and vineyards. Even now the road is sending up a shimmer of dust as a motor-car hurtles towards Yalta.

And to the right is shaggy Babugan. At dawn Babugan's crest is gold-covered, but at other times it is black. From those bristling spruce-points silhouetted against the sheen and the undulance of the glow comes our rain. To them goes our setting sun. From them comes also (so I always think) our night.

But at such a moment let us not think of night, or of night's elusive visions and scenes of another world. Those visions and scenes may return at nightfall if they will, but the present is morning, and at the morning hour we should merge ourselves with morning, and with the actualities of things beheld.

So let us meet morning with a prayer, and suffer it to unfold to us the distances.

But no—not the distances, for sometimes distances are best not contemplated—they may be as deceiving as a dream; for all their sheen of gold and green and blue, they may beckon, and give not. Away, then, with wonder-fancies! Before us lies stark reality.

For I know that those vineyards nestling below Kastel have not a single vine remaining in them. For I know that those white dwellings below Kastel have left to them but emptiness. For I know that those wooded foothills beside Kastel have had such a multitude of human lives swept away from them that all the earth is soaked with blood, and never again could give aught but wine rank, foul—productive neither of comfort nor of oblivion. Upon Kastel's grey, far-flung wall terrible things lie stamped. And one day those terrible things will be read.

So I will not look at the distances but towards our own ravine, and towards the young pear-trees beyond it. Farther, again, I see a stony strip which long made a battle for life, but now lies slain. It has on it only blackened vine-cusps ravaged by the cows, and soil fretted into wrinkles with last winter's floodings. And beyond, again, is a level space which once was a bowling-green, but on which, now, only the north wind bowls. And beside that space stands an ancient, twisted, hollow Tartar pear-tree which blossoms every spring, sheds its yellowish, copperish leaves as autumn approaches, and again stands as though awaiting a change. And though the awaited change never comes, the tree again fills with sap, again breaks into flower, and again withers.

Hawks love to lurk in its foliage. Crows use its boughs when they want to swing in the wind.

I can see something else also. From here that something else looks like a cripple afflicted with cataract, but once was a villa known as "Yasnaia Gorka," and tenanted by a school-mistress from Ekaterinoslav. True, it is on its legs still, but its body is all awry, and long ago was stripped bare of its vestments, and had its window-eyes put out. Also the stucco is fast peeling from its walls, and the roof parting company with its rafters. Yet still some dish-clouts are to be seen

suspended from nails by the kitchen-door, and fluttering in the wind! And where is the careful housewife who once put them out to dry? She is gone—elsewhither. A few sweet-smelling vinegar-shoots are sprouting beside the derelict verandah.

And as the villa is vacant, tenantless, it has been taken by a peacock.

THE BIRDS

By a peacock? Yes, by a vagrant peacock, a peacock which nobody wants, a peacock which evades night-prowling dogs by roosting on the villa's balcony railings.

That peacock once was mine. Now it is nobody's. And the villa belongs to nobody. And so do the dogs. And so does everything. Such is the peacock's position.

The truth is that the time came when I could no longer afford a peacock: and the bird, itself realising that, went off to abide in the wilderness. But it and I are still neighbours, and it not only ekes out a living, but, last winter, contrived to put forth a new tail—though not such a good one as the old. From time to time it visits me—stands under the cedar-tree where once it dozed in the heat, and says:

"*Won't* you give me something?"

"I can't, Pavka," I reply. "I myself have nothing."

With a jerk of its small, coroneted head, and a display of its tail, it repeats:

"But *won't* you give me something?"

Then it departs. It swings itself on to my gate, turns itself about, executes a pirouette or two, says for the last time: "*Won't* you give me something in consideration of my beauty?" and, with a green and golden glitter of train, shoots on to the empty road, and screeches away through the glens, in a hope, perhaps, that some peacock will answer it. And when one sees it again it has returned to its lonely villa, and is wandering around it. Also, it visits "Tikhaia Pristan," the Pribytkov's villa on the other side of the hill, since at one time the children there used to give it things. Now, however, it seeks "Tikhaia Pristan" in vain, for life there is as life everywhere else, and the bird has no choice but to go on to Verba's place, where, in exchange for a feather or two, the children *may* give it something. Lastly, and to

complete the ascent of the hill, it calls upon the old doctor. Alas, though, it is just at the old doctor's that life is at its lowest ebb of all, despite that not long ago the doctor was in the enjoyment of moderate comfort, and had a good roof to sleep under, and cedar-trees for his shading, and even was thinking of taking a partner. *Now* even to look at him is painful.

"Ai-oo-o-a-a-a-a!" the peacock cries. Ah, that lamentation as of the desert! Is the bird, then, complaining? Is it unhappy?

No; what has aroused it is its crying need of morning sustenance. For both it and I know that the forthcoming day must be spent in toil. So it pulls itself together, spreads its yellow, brown and silver-edged wings, shoots forth a head as proud and proud-glancing as that of a swarthy empress, surveys my ancient Tartar pear-tree, and realises that the tree has been picked clean already. So you may cry away, peacock—cry to all the world that you have been robbed!—Then, with flashes of blue and violet in the sunshine, it falls meditatively to pacing its balcony. Then, again jerking its silken neck, it reinspects the morning. Lastly, and with the swiftness of a streak of lightning, it flashes down on to my vineyard!

"Oh, rascal! Sh-sh-sh! Away with you!"

But the bird, caring nothing for shouts, still goes serpentine through the vine-stocks, and pecking off the ripening grapes. Yesterday it pecked off many more such. And though it goes against the grain to drive the beautiful, imperially stepping creature away, now that everyone and everything are hungry, the peacock is growing *too* daring a thief, is robbing me *too* openly, is depriving me of potential food (for even grapes may come to mean subsistence) with *too* great an absence of shame. So a stone flies in its direction, and upon that the bird grasps the situation, turns and twists amongst the vine-stocks, reaches the strip of brown soil beyond, shoots thence like a meteor of green and blue, and makes for its own villa. Then once more there comes to me the far-reaching desert cry of "Ai-oo-o-a-a-a-a!"

This year is making things particularly hard both for the

bird and for everything else, since this year no acorns have formed on the oaks, and neither brier nor bramble has fruited, and the whole countryside has become withered up with drought. However, after much tap-tap-tapping upon the bare, parched soil, the peacock appears to snap up something. Possibly the something is a bit of wild garlic or rotten onion, for my nostrils are assailed with the characteristically pungent garlic smell.

During the past summer the peacock formed the habit of visiting a cove in which some Greeks had sown wheat. And my turkey-hen also, during the summer, took to convoying thither her brood of chicks—walking them through the jealously guarded wheat stems. And as wheat nowadays is wealth, and needs to be watched as such, the Greeks spent their nights and their days in the cove, and at night, in particular, lay with a lantern placed beside them, and ears strained for any sound in the darkness which might mean the advent of a wheat thief. For when famine is abroad wheat has many and many a foe!

.

By this time the sun has risen, and I must let out the feathered family. How poor and ragged the little creatures look! Indeed, we should not be justified in keeping them, and making them sharers of our last few grains, were it not that they are our last link with the past. In particular, look at that miserable turkey-hen! No mate has she, yet by persistently sitting upon a round dozen of barndoor eggs, and refusing all food, she has contrived to hatch out twelve tiny chicks. And to those chicks, though only their foster-mother, she devotes her care unremittingly. For example, she has taught them how to scan the heavens with one eye at a time. Also she has taught them how to walk with legs properly splayed. Also she has taught them how, by using their wings, to scale the boarding of their coop run. And upon ourselves she has conferred a benefit, since the management of her and hers has given us another means of occupying the weary hours of a weary time.

So as soon as dawn whitens the heavens I let out the petulant turkey-hen, and say to her: "Now! Be off with you!"

But for long she stands rounding her eyes at me—first the one of them, and then the other. For in her opinion she and her chicks ought to be fed. And as for them, the poor, tender little chicks, they run fluttering to my hands, and try to climb up my rags, and implore food with their eyes, and even peck at my lips with their tiny beaks. But the fluffy little things are manifestly failing. Daily they are growing lighter. So why did I let them come to life? Was it because I wished to conceal from myself the emptiness of my own, and to fill that emptiness with birdlike voices?

"Little ones, pardon! And now, mother-turkey, do you take them over *there*."

But she has no need for further guidance as to the place. Long ago she discovered the whereabouts of the wheat cove, and also that if the Greeks caught her there she and hers would be expelled. So, in the half-light of dawn, she goes stealing along under oak and hornbeam, until, reaching a spot where the wheat—her feeding-ground—approaches close to a clump of bushes, she mounts the fence, poises herself there for a moment—then dives straight into the crop, and proceeds hastily to strip and shell the ears with her powerful beak. And the brood will remain there the whole day long, though half-dead with thirst before evening is come. And then they will return home, and drink as though *pumping*, not sucking, the water into themselves. Lastly, it being now too dark for the chicks to do so for themselves, I settle them and their foster-mother into the coop for the night.

True, at times my conscience pricks me about the wheat; but what I also feel is that, as the turkey-hen is not responsible for life being what it is now, even as I myself am not responsible for the circumstance, I cannot place any obstacles in her way, but, saying to her just, "Mother-turkey, if you will thieve, I suppose you must," must pursue the matter no farther.

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This summer the peacock too learnt how to reach the cove. But thereupon trouble with the Greeks arose. This was because at intervals the bird *would* shake out its tail above the level of the crop. And at last the Greeks raised loud shouts, and, thereby flushing the other marauders as well, drove forth the whole body of miscreants—then presented themselves at my gates.

“Why let your birds do like that?” they cried. “They ought to be killed, and killed at once. You yourself ought to do it.”

The fellows’ lean, hawklike faces had upon them a distinctly hostile look, and their bared teeth an unpleasant whiteness. Seemingly they were men capable even of murder. And in these days anything is possible.

“Yes!” they shouted. “Kill them at once! Put an end to the thieving, accursed creatures! Do it, we tell you! Do it at once!”

The moment was an awkward one. Yet I felt that I could not kill the birds—the less so because, as they were hungry, they had a certain right to do as they had done. And oh, the cost of artificial poultry food!

“My friends,” I said at length, “at least they shall not be let out again, even though they take at the most but a few grains.”

“But did you sow those grains?” the men retorted. “Why, it is our very bread that you are stealing! Your head ought to be bashed in. In the end you will be the ruin of us.”

And again they shouted at me, and banged the gate with sticks as though they meant to break it in. And as they poured forth their furious and incoherent oaths their necks grew distended and sweaty, and their eyeballs prominent, and their breath redolent of garlic.

“Kill those chickens!” they yelled again. “In fact, as there are no justices now, we may as well do the job ourselves!”

In their incoherent cries I could hear once more the beast life, the cave existence, which these hills once knew, and which has returned to them again. For these men had raging in them a terror born of a daily worsening plight, a plight in

which the life of a human being had come to be of less account than a few grains of wheat.

But since then the Greeks have reaped their crop, taken it to the town in sacks, and removed themselves elsewhere. They had not been gone an hour before again the cove was seething with life as thither, in search of shed grain: there flocked thousands of pigeons which hitherto had escaped the destroying hand of man, and children who spent whole days on hands and knees, and the peacock, the turkey-hen and her chicks—these last, though, to be speedily driven away by the children. Only when there remained not a single grain to be garnered did the cove resume its wonted silence.

THE WILDERNESS

BUT what of Tamarka?

By this time she has nibbled off the tip of every pear-branch that she can find projecting over the fence, chewed some of the other branches to rags, and left the whole for the sun to finish.

And again my gate is creaking as she butts at the latch with her horns.

"Tamarka, where are you coming to?"

But, for all that, I see a sharp horn making its way into a chink, and threatening to break through. The attraction in the case is my green, succulent Indian corn. So the chink grows wider, and presently has inserted into it a pink velvet muzzle which emits a vastly greedy snort, and dribbles wisps of saliva.

"Back, now, Tamarka!"

So she tucks in her lips, removes the muzzle, and stands absolutely motionless. For whither else is she to go? Everywhere is desolation. Yet to think of my kitchen-garden, of the little ledge of broken-up slate upon which I have worked so carefully, whence I have removed pebbles, whither I have carried sackfuls of soil with the rocks cutting my feet, and the bushes scratching my hands——! And if you ask me why I scoured the ravines on that ledge's account I reply that I scoured them in order to kill my inmost thoughts.

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I reach the top of the ridge, throw down my heavy sack, fold my arms, and stand gazing at the sea. Ah, that vista of blue! As I gaze at it, it is through drops of mingled sweat and tears in my eyes. And is that my modest, red-roofed dwelling behind those cypress-trees?—is that *really* my dwelling? It is so, although its garden has not a sign of life in it, and the

surroundings, too, are deserted. No one ever passes that way. The peacock alone, looking from here no larger than a pigeon, is pacing the wilderness, and peck-peck-pecking at the bare ground as it goes. Around the villa is perennial silence. Only on spring evenings does a blackbird perch itself upon a withered mountain-ash, and sing to the mountains, to the sea, to my young pear-trees in blossom, to the little dwelling, and to ourselves. . . . But how shabby that dwelling is! Even from here its dilapidations are manifest. The rains have washed bare the back wall of the villa, and so started some of the stones from their mortar that they will have to be worked into place again. And that I must do before autumn's deluges come—as come they will. . . . But oh, that I could forget all things!—oh, that I could learn to live without thinking at all, and just go on levelling the garden with my spud, and fetching sackfuls of earth, and strewing those sackfuls upon—upon what? Upon my thoughts!

I can see, too, that the gales have fretted patches from the roofing, and left holes and crannies which must be filled up with rubble. What really is needed is a skilled roofer: but now not a single roofer is left in the neighbourhood. Stay, though! There is old Kulesh. At this very moment I can hear him hammering away beyond that hillock, with, for his task, the welding of old iron into stoves either for his neighbours or for traders in the steppe country from whom he obtains, in exchange, grain and potatoes. Ah, in these days old iron is a useful commodity to possess!

So, with the wind from the sea blowing around me, I gaze at the exquisite view until my eyes alight upon our small capital town. In that town there is an ancient tower dating from the period of the Genoese régime. You can see it projecting heavenward like a great black gun, and, at a lower level, jutting out into the waters, a pier which looks like a many-legged footstool, and, beside it, a boat like a cockleshell. And there, to one side, is bald-headed Chatyr Dagh, or "The Hill of Palaces," with, farther away again, grey, storm-breeding Demerdzhi of the eagle-haunted gorges, and lastly, showing but faintly, the ranged hills about Sudak.

Does not the town look pleasant with its vineyards and cypresses and poplars? But that pleasant appearance is only deceptive. True, the windows there seem to be smiling, and the white dwellings to be full of cheerful, comfortable people, and the spotless house of God to be signing the cross over a meek little pastorate as the vespers bell tolls the "Svieta Tikhi."¹ Yet I know by experience how distances may smile and yet deceive. For if you were to approach that little town, you would soon discover that the only thing smiling there is the sunshine, and that, even so, that sunshine is smiling into dead window-eyes, and that the seemingly peaceful stillness is the unhealthy stillness of a graveyard, and that the one thought lurking under every roof in the place is the thought of how the next bite of food is to be procured.

In the town there are no longer a pastor and a church. There are only a jailer and a jail. Yes, the building which once was a church now has sitting at its doors, not a sexton, but a dull-visaged fellow with a red star on his cap. And as the sun glints upon his bayonet he bawls before the jealously guarded prison door: "Keep away from here! Keep away from here!"

And the beauty of the neighbourhood's gardens and vineyards is deceptive. Both lie ruined and desolate. Nor are those villas now tenanted by their rightful masters. All such masters are either fled or buried, whilst their successors, wholly unused to dwelling in villas of the sort, have broken every window, pulled up every floor, drunken dry every cellar (wallowed in wine as they had already wallowed in blood), and left themselves with nothing to do save to sit by the sea with aching heads and gaze moodily upon the mountains. Aye, and as they gaze upon the mountains the mountains gaze upon *them*.

Yes, that gaze of the mountains is a very real thing! And so is their smile! Look over there, now, and you will see below Demerdzhi's slopes a round, grey tumulus. Once that tumulus was a Tartar village. For centuries of time the mountains looked down upon that village. Then Demerdzhi

¹ "The Light of Peace."

smiled its stony smile, and in a second of time that Tartar habitation had become a tomb.

And such a stony silencing will come again. It is on the way already.

And you too, my Tamarka, are fallen into a tomb, but, refusing to accept the fact, stand stamping your hoofs upon the ground and beating your head against my gate! Oh, how thin you have grown, my poor darling!

She looks at my upraised hand, and her glassy eyes show as blue as the heavens and the wind-swept sea. "Whither else am I to go?" she asks. Her sides are all fallen in, and her flank-bones projecting, and the lines of her spine sharpened to a knife-edge, with the back half eaten away with the blood-sucking of gnats and gadflies, and the sores on her back exuding pus as a cluster of young grubs irritates the heat-festered wounds, and the udder below blackened and drawn in, and the teats so dry and wrinkled that even the most skilful housewife could never again wring thence a drop of milk.

"Tamarka, I have nothing whatsoever for you. Away, I say!"

But she will not believe me, for she knows the mighty power of man, and refuses to understand why she is not fed by him.

I too, Tamarka, cannot understand it. I too cannot understand how anyone or anything has benefited through this country of ours having been turned into a blood-soaked wilderness. Not long ago, you will remember, any man would have been glad to give you a piece of bread, or a pinch of salt, and to pat your warm dewlaps, and at eventide receive your udderful of milk. But *now*, could any man draw milk from one who, though accustomed always to bring forth with the spring, has this year had to go calflless and barren, with the ring on her horns in no way enlarged?

I see tears in her eyes—dumb, bovine tears, whilst from the lips stretched forth towards the already twice-stripped brambles a saliva fringe of hunger is hanging. With a great effort she withdraws her eyes from my Indian corn—turns—gazes towards the sea. But in the sea, too, there are

only emptiness and blueness. And that she knows—she knows only too well that in the sea there are only water and rock.

My eyes also turn towards the sea—for at least one may still look at the sea without permission, and look at it in whatsoever direction one chooses, and for as long a time as one chooses.

So I look towards Trébizonde, towards the unseen continent of Asia. There Kemal Pasha is engaged in a general warfare with the nations, whilst here, in the Crimea, panic-stricken Tartars are whispering:

“*Tsé, tsé, tsé!* Let Kemal Pasha come to the Crimea and fire off his guns. If only he would do that the Bolsheviks would take to flight, and we should again have mutton, and grain, and plenty of everything. Oh, Kemal Pasha is a great leader, the very man for us!”

To the right are the distant Bosphorus and Stamboul the Magnificent. There there are mountains of corn and sugar and coffee and mutton and cheese!

And to the left, under the morning haze, there lies my own country—bathed in her sacred blood!

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The sea, blue and empty, has not a wisp of cloud reflected on its surface, but only currents showing as silver tracks on the sun-fretted sheet of azure.

For that sea is but a dead sea, a sea no longer haunted of the cheery “tramp,” a sea no longer bearing on its bosom freighted grain and tobacco and wool and wine, but rather the sea of a land eaten bare, and drunken dry, and devastated throughout.

Yet the sun is still painting his pictures upon it, and, with increasing heat and light, turning its shores from violet to pink even as, to-night, with the return of chill, it will once more make them violet. I scan the beach and its fringe of frothy, whitish-blue ripples, but can discern not a soul, not a sign of life. No longer is the beach peopled by the copper-faced Tartars who sold pot-bellied basketfuls of peaches, grapes and pears; nor the garrulous, knavish

Armenians of Eastern Kutais who traded in Caucasian shawls, kerchiefs, and veils of delicately interwoven colours, the delight of the ladies; nor the pseudo-Italians who displayed trayfuls of pedlars' wares; nor the dusty-footed, sweaty photographers who took "pleasing likenesses" with the rocks for a background, and distributed "*Merci's*," and manipulated black cloths, with an equal admixture of self-consciousness, *huteur* and condescension. Aye, that beach no longer sees dealings in Uralian gems, in cracknels at a *kopek* each, in shells stamped "YALTA" in Chinese ink. And gone are the Tartar guides of Korbek, the men in blue twill riding-breeches whose waxed moustaches, Apollo-like figures, and canes thrust into polished riding-boots, exuded a perennial scent of garlic and peppercorn. And gone are the phaetons upholstered in poppy-coloured plush, and decked with red beads and tabs and tinsel, and fitted with hoods inflated by the speed of the vehicles' progress, and drawn by horses studded with red rosettes and silver harness-bells (shaped like the grouse of the Crimea, the real harness-bells of Baktchi-Sarai), which used to come driving smoothly and jauntily past the villas just at the hour when the inmates were thinking of awakening to another day, and the air was redolent throughout with glycine and mimosa and magnolia and rose and vine, and the gardeners were applying cooling water, or rich, steaming mulches to their charges. And gone are the huge, muscular Turks in blue breeches who used to leave their task of avenue-planting at midday in favour of slumber under a rock. And gone are the parasols which flaunted every colour of the rainbow, even as are the fine bronzed and virile Tartar veterans who, with withered features, and flowing turbans, and chocolate-tinted skins, would at sunset fall upon their knees, turn towards Mecca, and pray with a frenzied devotion that rocked them to and fro.

And they have gone—whither? Is it thou, O sea, that hast devoured them? The sea makes no reply. It merely—sports.

Indeed, who now could, even if he wished, buy or sell anything, or drive a phaeton, or roll golden tobacco into cigarettes? For everything has become shrivelled up, and

every owner of a villa either is sleeping his last sleep below the ground or has departed across the waters—leaving his late dwelling to stare blindly at the desolate strand with its sinuous files of cormorants.

But stay! I can see an old woman hobbling along the beach road. Barefooted and ragged she is, with a face so drawn and stupefied with suffering as to be almost expressionless, and arms laden with a frayed straw wallet—the contents of the wallet three potatoes and an empty bottle.

“And they sa-a-aid that everything would be be-e-etter!”

There is trudging along the road, too, a small donkey, and, behind it, an elderly Tartar. The donkey is laden with a faggot of firewood. The man, wearing a red lambskin fez, is unkempt of body and sullen of expression. And as he passes one of the ruined villas he jerks his head towards the broken fence of the place, towards the carcass of a horse and a lopped cypress-tree, with a muttered:

“*Tsé, tsé, tsé!* What devils they are!”

For he will be remembering the days when, calling at that villa with fruit and poultry, he found things there so much better than they are now, when he can scarcely sell enough even to buy for himself a pinch of salt!

And lastly, a half-intoxicated soldier of the Red Army comes along on a fly-bitten, ranting little charger. Kicking up the dust behind him, he is a man without country and without ties, but at least privileged to have his earcap decked with a battered old red star. Projecting from one pocket of his breeches is a *vedro* bottle. Evidently he has succeeded in finding some cellar not yet wholly emptied, and is conveying a sample of its contents for his superiors' entertainment.

Oh, the wilderness before my eyes!

Yet still I see the sun smiling, and shadows playing over the mountains! Well, why should they not play there? A human body with ruddy life in it must, to the mountains, seem much the same as a human body with extinct eyes and livid flesh—as much the same as wine and water, as much the same as the bearer of the red star and anybody else.

But suddenly he reins up—scans one of the derelict villas

with stupid, puckered eyes. Why so? He is endeavouring to discern whether or not the villa has a pane of glass unbroken in it.

"A-ah!" And he draws and aims.

"A-a-ah!"

And again he aims.

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But whither else, I ask, can Tamarka go?

She stretches her muzzle towards the blue, empty sea, and gives a prolonged bellow—then another one—and then another. That done, she crosses the road, plunges into the ravine on the other side of it, and halts thoughtfully over a piece of dried thornywort. To eat, or not to eat? Then, with a snort, she resumes her way, for her bovine scent has reminded her that thornywort gives rise to internal pangs and a shrunken udder.

And I? Well, to-day I must do what I did yesterday—just that and nothing else. Or, in other words, I must first of all gather an armful of young vine-leaves, and chop them fine for conversion into soup. And though a little garlic would have been welcome, as garlic is so sustaining, no garlic whatsoever is left. And next? Oh, next I must gather an armful of young vine-leaves for our livestock and our poultry—for our last link with the past. And lastly I must drive the poultry afield, and give them a chance at least of catching a few grasshoppers. Yet in me there is a fear lest the birds may not survive beyond the autumn—However, let us not think of such things, and the less so now that the poultry have learnt to respond to our caresses, and to roost in our laps. Even at this moment their scaly little eyes are all agape as they come tumbling, fluttering out of the coop—simply because they believe themselves to have heard the rattling of a tin bowl!

"Grain?" they cry (for they can almost talk). Ah, how well I know what Robinson Crusoe must have felt!

And so the day begins.

IN THE VINEYARD RAVINE

A RAVINE, a cavity in the earth? No, what I am speaking of is my church, study and storehouse in one, seeing that it is the place whence I draw my daily bread, and where I have my flower-garden of a single tuft of red-gold and bee-haunted "lion's jaw"—a place whose window is the blue vista of the sea and whose contents are slowly ripening vines.

Did I, then, say that it was also a church? If so, I did wrong, for no longer am I legally permitted to have either a church or a God, but only to believe that the blue heavens above me are empty. Ah, but still I can shield and protect myself from the wilderness amongst these shale cliffs and their remaining specimens of still-life in the shape of apple-trees and pear-trees and vines.

So I descend the yielding loam and review my stores. This year the apple-trees will bear little or nothing, for, just at the time when the fruit-buds were opening, the "hairy beetle" came flying hither in myriads, and, falling upon the white cusps, sucked at and nibbled at their golden *stamina*. True, at midday, when the beetles were drowsy (for they sleep at noontide), I brushed them off in thousands; but——! And my peach-tree has now run wild, and has on it but a few wretched, half-formed, stone-hard fruit. And my cherry-tree has long had on it only kernels picked clean and dry by the black-birds. And my quince is barren, and veiled with spiders' webs. And even the briars and brambles promise nothing.

But stay! The Grecian nut-tree at least is coming into full strength and beauty, and after giving us, last year, its first year of bearing, but three nuts in all (one for each member of the family, and we thanked the dear creature for its kind-

ness), is this year going to be much more generous, and give us as many nuts as seventeen—yes, though the family has now become reduced to two.¹

Seating myself in the shade of the nut-tree, I fall into a reverie.

So you are still living, O youthful beauty, with your green, juicy leaves, and your limpidity of shade? You have been cheered by the summer, then, and are really a creature of this world, and not, like so many other things, a creature done to death?

It is pleasant indeed to sit and be seen of none, to sit with simple vine-stocks for companions and the peace of a morning hour! For even though some blue jays are screeching and fluttering on the ancient almond-trees at the end of my vine-stocks' straggling rows, the ravine is perfectly quiet. On one side everything is still in shadow. The sun has not yet caught there. But on the other side the sunlight is tingeing warmly golden the surface of my young pear-trees' site and illuminating the trees themselves with pearls.

Behind is the sea's blue window, for in this direction the ravine falls steeply, and allows the azure of the sea to become visible through the resultant cuplike gap. How often do I drain that cup with my eyes!

I should like always to be able to sit here without a single thought in my mind!

"Ai-oo-o-a-a-a!" comes to me the peacock's desert cry.

But no,—it is impossible to sit here thought-free, since, for one thing, my study-door is permanently open and allows entry to such intruding voices and sounds as Tamarka bellowing from her very womb, and an echoing rifle-shot—the latter a sign, probably, that someone is being "hunted" somewhere on the mountains.

Next there comes to me from above the sound of a drawling, childish voice:

"Some bre-e-ead, please!" it says. "Yes, just a ti-ny piece!"

And I hear also the rattling of a samovar spout. All of

¹ The author's young son had meanwhile been shot by the Bolsheviks.

which shows me the sounds' source to be the next cottage above us.

"Oh, that Volodichka!" someone else exclaims. "*What* a child he is! Haven't I already said that——?"

In the voice there is a note of weariness, of weakness, and I know it to be the voice of an old lady who, fallen into the pit with the rest of us, has two foster-children named Vovoda and Lialia living with her. Mostly they engage in bouts of fisticuffs.

"A ti-i-iny bit!"

"I have said that I have none! But see—I am just going to boil rose-leaves, and make tea, so that——"

"But I want some bu-utter!"

"Oh, you will drive me wild! Lialia, do take him away—take him anywhere you like so long as it is out of my sight."

Upon that there ensues a scrambling and a pattering, and then, in Lialia's thin and breathless voice:

"'Bu-utter,' thou sayest? Oh, I'll give thee 'bu-utter,' I'll 'bu-utter' thine ears!"

"Hush, Lialia! Quieter, if you please. And you ought *not* to say '*uski*.' You ought to say '*usbi*.'¹ Nor is it nice to talk of 'buttering' people. How can you speak like that, and especially when I've told you to speak in French whenever you can?"

Speaking in French at death's door—speaking in French! Yet very likely the old lady is right—very likely there *is* a use in her French, in her geography, in her daily scourings and cleanings, in her daily polishings of door-handles, in her daily beatings-up of cushions. For may not such things at least help towards hanging on, towards refusing to give in? "Which are the two longest rivers in the world?" "The Nile and the Amazon." "And where do they flow?" "In Egypt and South America." "And which are the three largest towns?" "London, and Paris, and New York." Now, in Paris——"

Curiously enough, I never seat myself in this ravine in the early morning, and hear the samovar spout rattle, but at

¹ Ears.

once I begin to think of Paris—yes, of Paris, a place which I have never even seen! The idea of sitting in a remote Crimean dell, and thinking of a city of such a wholly different world—albeit, possibly, a world now as extinct, as divorced from life as our own!

But the chief reason why Paris sometimes arises before my mind in this way is that sometimes the old lady, my neighbour, talks to me of the days when she was educated there, and in Berlin. Yet how far away from here such places seem! And to think that an ex-sojourner in Paris should now be wandering about in a knitted shawl—an ailing, dejected old lady who fumbles constantly at her headgear, and chews whitlow grass! Why, in her day she knew all Paris, and went for drives in the Bois de Boulogne, and viewed the Venus of Milo, and inspected Notre Dame! How comes she to be living in that hut up the ravine, and bickering with her foster-children, and selling clothes and teaspoons that she may gain those children salt and musty barley, and abiding in constant dread lest a carpet of hers may have to go as well, or lest men should arrive by night to seize her last shawl and last half-pound of salt? Oh, there is something of a mystery about her!

Paris? In Paris well-fed people still must be driving in the Bois de Boulogne, as they did in Maupassant's day, and the arrogant, steel-projected Tower of Eiffel rearing its skeleton frame. Yet in Paris, also, there soon may be heard, as in other cities, the crackling of flames, seeing that, whereas, in Paris, people still may be walking about cheerfully and in freedom, we here are being robbed even of salt, being made to stand with our faces to the wall, forced to catch cats for food, hunted down, shot in cellars, confined in houses barbed around with wire for the purpose of human battues! Aye, in what other part of the civilised world are such things being done? In what other part of the civilised world have human beings been reduced to the level of beasts, forced to devour their own children, forced to become such that even the animals realise the horror of it all?

Yet it may be that Paris and London no longer exist,

that they have fallen as so many other cities have done! Then, if so, what subjects for a cinematographer they would make, and what millions and millions of feet of film they would require! O cities of two great peoples, *are* you still standing? And if so, are you crowding to look at films of ourselves? For at least we could supply you (and a hundred other cities, for that matter) with such films, films replete with blood, films in every way capable of diverting even the most mixed of audiences—audiences composed of gaping boulevardiers, of folk in evening-dress, of folk in morning-coats or smoking-jackets or peajackets, of workmen in blouses, of women in sables snatched from others' shoulders, and in diamonds torn from others' ears. So gaze away, Europe, and let the sea bear to you on its bosom cups made of human skulls, human bones for service as lucky mascots, writing-cases of "russia-leather," Russian hair designed to pad the fauteuils of Parliamentary deputies, pyxes and crucifixes made into cigar-rests, little shrines of saints now figuring as tinkling money-boxes! And, Europe, you may the more safely buy these things in that the human blood-market is simply clamorous, simply frenzied, for such articles. But take care lest eventually Russia shall not be the only country whence such merchandise shall be exported. Aye, is Europe really intact still? I, sitting in this remote vineyard, cannot see so far. How are the "rights of man" getting on? Are the pages in Europe's Great Books still uniformly whole?

Yes, Paris, as viewed from this remote Crimean terrace, looms as a city of such a distant and legendary and unsubstantial world as almost to resemble the unsubstantial scenes which I behold in my dreams. But at least, in Paris, the rock cannot stare forth from the soil and mock one's hunger, as it does here? No, doubtless the rockwork of Paris stands ranged in rows forming decorous buildings, and has gas jets flaring over it, and is inhabited by human beings wholly different from ourselves. Also Paris must have brazen orchestras braying everywhere. And in Paris her wonder of towered steel must be gazing ceaselessly to the earth's extremities, and intercepting the earth's myriad voices. Then

can that wonder of steel hear *our* voices, the voices of captives penned in bloodstained cellars? O Tower of Eiffel, if really thou hearest those groans, those groans represent the anguish of a people which once saved thee from destruction. For thus it stands written in the memory-tablets of my silver-haired neighbour:

But perhaps Paris's brazen orchestras are braying too loudly for those voices to reach her?

“Bre-e-ead!—Some bre-e-ead!”

And other lands have bakers' shops standing open by day and by night! In other lands bread can be seen ranged on shelf and in window! . . . Yet is that so?

“My God, I am worn out! Lialia, take Vovoda away! Soon nurse will be coming back. Give him one of those little pears to gnaw. When will this torment end?”

“This torment end?” Why, for her that torment has scarcely begun! Yesterday Bezruki, the one-armed locksmith of Sukhaia Balka, had Minetz's red dog for dinner, though a week earlier I had seen his wife baking flour patties. And yesterday we ourselves had but a few almonds for breakfast. Whereas *she* still has left to her a fine carpet and a necklace of Parisian brilliants! So as yet she has scarcely even made the acquaintance of torment. Besides, by what means could our torment be brought to an end? And though the sun in his glory may gaze into our souls, and speak wondrously of a coming “velvet season,” when there will be merry garnerings of grapes into baskets, and autumn's joyous pageant will dawn, a pageant of vine-leaves silhouetted against blue and silver sea-frets, the sun knows only too well how to mock.

Yes, indeed! The sun does know how to mock, seeing that what really await us are winds hurtling from Chatyr Dag, snowdrifts heaping themselves upon the peak of Mount Palat, and rains streaming from black Babugan.

But that for the future. For the present I at least have a few grape gems of black muscat and golden-pink Alexandrian

glowing ripely on their tender vine-stocks. In other words, I have a whole week's food in hand.

So I walk along the vine rows, pluck leaves for soup, and inspect the bunches. Some dogs must have been in during the night, for several bitten-into bunches are broken off and scattered about. But how can the dogs have been hungry, seeing that for nights past they have been snarling and fighting over the carcass of a horse in a neighbouring glen?—Oh, I might have known better! Why, it has been the doing of the peacock and my pullets. Daily, I know, they are taking toll of my provisions.

But though the vineyard is small, it is beautiful. And all of it represents my own work—I myself, last spring, pruned the stocks, broke off stout withies for them, drove their stakes into the shale, and tied them up. And when I had done all that (how long ago it seems!) I sat down upon that crooked stump, looked for a moment through tears at the bright blue, iridescent chalice which the Almighty had created for my thirsty soul, and—drained the cup.

THE BREAD OF SUBSISTENCE

Up out of the vineyard I climb with the armful of leaves which is to constitute the day's bread of subsistence.

"Good morning to you!" I hear.

Ah, I know the voice. It is the voice of the little eight-year-old Lialia. Lialia, standing barefooted beside the cypress-tree, has a slight squint in her eyes, and a costume consisting of a white linen jacket over a red skirt—the latter having served her as a skirt since the spring before last. And though constantly exposed to the sun, she is pale and fragile and transparent of appearance. But at least she has really intelligent eyes, true Russian eyes, eyes which can launch their darts long distances. At present they are raking Babugan. And from the expression in them I see that they have hit their mark. Says she:

"Do you see that motor-car rushing along towards Yalta? Yesterday *three* motor-cars came along. Some 'Greens' were being hunted, I expect."

"Oh, everything sooner or later comes to your knowledge! But who are your 'Greens'?"

"Those who won't give in. Heaps of them lie buried in the forest. *I* know all about it!"

It is as she says. Winding along the top of the wooded peaks there is a dust-cloud which presently disappears, yet whence still there comes to one's ears the swift, invisible machine's crackling.

Lialia's eyes transfer themselves to my vineyard.

"Look!" she cries. "Pavka has been here again! He must have been, for he has left a feather behind him. And this morning Tamarka was eating your almond-tree."

"Then we shall have almond milk."

Lialia laughs, but not with the laugh of old, and her eyes, of as light a blue as the distances, do not join in the laugh at all—they are looking elsewhere.

"Yesterday," is her next remark, "some men came and took away Minetz's cow."

And rather awestruck she seems as she says it.

"I had heard so," I reply. "Also I had heard that yesterday Bezruki ate Minetz's red dog for dinner."

"He did. It was the stumpy-tailed dog which used to come running to *our* place. But Bezruki is a Pole. And what can one expect of Poles? They'll eat *anything*. One day, too, I saw him enticing a cat to his hut. And, you know, he has a large meat safe, a safe with ever such a heavy lid to it, for keeping his bits of horseflesh in. And one day I heard a bang—like that. And afterwards I heard him say, 'Now I don't care a fig for hunger. I have got a cat all ready'—But are cats *nice*?"

"I shouldn't think so. But have *you* had anything to eat this morning?"

"Have *I* had anything to eat this morning?" She re-echoes the words with a touch of nervousness and, withal, diverts her gaze to the ravine.

"Yes, you *have* had something to eat, I suppose?"

"Nurse is just coming back," she remarks irrelevantly. But her face is flushed as she says it, and with one of her feet she keeps rolling a clod of shale to and fro. "By the way, let me help you in your work. Oh, *what* a lot of leaves you have gathered!"

The truth is that she is reluctant to tell me how things really stand, and to admit that as yet, this morning, she and hers have not touched a bite, nor will do so until nurse has returned from exchanging the carpet for provisions.

"Ribachikha is getting no better," she goes on. "No, even though she has sold her cow Manka. And *such* a large family she has—*such* a lot of children!"

Lialia always likes to talk like a grown-up. But she talks after the manner of one who has an inquiring head upon her shoulders. Everything that is going on, whether in the countryside or in the town or along the sea-front, is known to her.

"And what else have you to tell me to-day?"

By this time we have reached my kitchen-door, and halted—she shyly rubbing one leg against the other, and I preparing to shred my leaves.

“Well, yesterday your turkey-hen called upon the doctor, and broke one of his kitchen-cups. Perhaps I ought to have told him about it, but I didn’t like to. Oh, I can tell you something more interesting still. *Such* a dreadful thing has happened at Verba’s.”

“And that dreadful thing is——?”

This causes Lialia to brighten, and her eyes to flash. My curiosity has gratified her, and folding her arms upon her breast as she has seen her foster-mother do, she continues:

“Don’t you know? Well, last night one of their geese was stolen!”

“N-no?”

“Yes—stolen! And it never cackled. You can see for yourself. Look! Only *one* goose is walking about there now.”

From my kitchen-door I can see the whole of the knoll. Sure enough, only one goose *is* walking about at Verba’s, with, behind it, the peacock, pecking desultorily at the ground.

“Uncle Andrei it must have been,” whispers Lialia with a glance towards where “Tikhaia Pristan” stands hidden by a ridge beyond the ravine and the peacock’s desolate abode. “Do you know, he is *such* a horrid man now. No one could be more likely. It was like this. During the night we heard a noise. And then we caught *such* a smell of roast goose! It was enough to choke you. That was because at night-time the wind blows from the direction of Uncle Andrei’s and Babugan. What lard and dripping the goose must have made! O-o-oh!”

Her mouth is watering, I see, and her throat working. Her mind must be diverted, and diverted quickly.

“Why,” I ask her, “did the schoolmistress cry out like that last night? I suppose you heard her?”

“Of course I did!” And again Lialia folds her arms in a state of excitement. “It happened like this. Late yesterday evening the schoolmistress was coming home from the town by the Amudovs’ vineyard. And as she can’t see very well in the dark without her glasses, she thought to herself all of

a sudden: 'Why, I hear some dogs howling!' And then the sound seemed more like the screeching of a saw. And then, just when she had reached the vineyard, she looked and caught sight of some wretches cutting down a pear-tree. Yes, and the vineyard was all in a mess, and the hurdles down, so that anyone could walk over it. She called out, 'What are you doing there? What do you mean by cutting down a pear-tree in a private orchard?' Oh, she cursed and cursed the men! And what did *they* do? Why, before she had so much as said 'a pear-tree in a private orchard' they had bolted! No, she wasn't a bit afraid of them. She just gave them a piece of her mind."

"Well, little 'Intelligencer,' your reward shall be a cake. But as soon as you get it you must take it home to share with Vovoda."

Upon that she shrinks back slightly, although brightening. Yes, she waves away the cake, though she cannot take her eyes from it.

"Oh!" she cries. "But what about yourselves? I would rather not take what you yourselves need so badly. Oh, why should I? I ought not to. And in any case we have got something."

The end of it is that I have to take her by the shoulders, and *force* the cake upon her,

"Why should I," she repeats, "when you too have almost nothing——? Well, thank you very much! Thank you very, very much!"

She eyes the cake all over, and shyly digging her heels into the shale, bites off a tiny piece. Then she departs. At first her departure is a fairly quiet movement, for she is holding herself in: but presently its speed increases, becomes a sheer rush which sends her and her red skirt and her polished, sunburnt legs flickering over the ridges of shale like a streak of lightning. Then a panting voice cries: "Voldia! Voldichka!" and I know that she has reached home. Also I know that Vovoda himself will come out to thank me presently. Yes, and he is there already. Approaching, and taking up his stand under the young oak-trees just beyond my prickly

hedge, the little four-year-old, white-headed, and clad in a diminutive shirt of patchwork over knickerbockers one-half of which is brown stuff cut from a jacket of the old lady's, and the other half ordinary material, cries lustily, oh, so lustily:

"Ve-e-ery many thanks! Ve-e-ery, ve-e-ery many thanks!"

And so I realise that the world still has children's voices left in it, and still some kindness, even though adults have taken to harsh terms of address, and are coming to eye one another distrustfully, and even to snarl rather than to speak.

Next—to let out the turkey-hen and her chicks. These creatures, which for all I know may be with us only until to-morrow, are our last-remaining confidants, our last-remaining kinsfolk as it were, the last witnesses of our decay. Yet, though they cannot speak, at least they are good listeners.

To begin with, I insert a piece of bent wire into the ventilation hole made at the top of the coop, and draw out the stanchion with which, during the night, the little door has been secured from within. And then—and then, I am overwhelmed with an avalanche of poultry which issue none the less impetuously because they have had to spend the night tongue-tied.

"So you are still alive, my children? Good morning!"

They swirl around my feet, they will not let me move a step, they scan my face and hands for food, they say, "Grain? Grain?" and run after me with necks outstretched, eyes heedless of what is under their feet, and souls seething with agitation as to whether the feeding-bowls are going to be put out. Nay, at times they even leap upon me like dogs! The lean, fine-drawn turkey-hen alone bears herself with decorum—looking, as she does so, like a bottle on legs.

But how wasted my little chicks are! In particular, how wasted are *you*, little Torpedka of the white plumage and the scaly, over-prominent eyes! And the same with you, little Pearl—assuredly it is with an indifferent air of gaiety that you are bearing yourself. Only you, little Glutton, have hastened to remember the shrew-mouse's head of last night which you brought from a ravine, and then had to abandon,

and now are probing as though every one of your fellows had not pecked it over already. Well, tiny one, come and whisper in my ear. Are you searching my pockets because you have known grain to be found there alongside my watch? Well, I *have* got something for you. See! I have got one, two, ten, twenty grains! . . . But why peck at my hand now that all the grain is gone? Rather let me give you a word of warning. At present, O Glutton, be particularly careful of yourself. At present little birds should walk with especial care, seeing that only beyond that foothill yonder there are plenty of fine fellows who love to feast, and especially to feast upon young chicklets. Yes, any day those fellows might come for *you*, and remove you as a "redundant," since, though one may keep as many as five head of poultry, I have more than five such head, and therefore might any day be deprived of the excess. But we must not think of such things.

Next, when I have filled the feeding-vessels with stewed vine-leaves the poultry fight for the leaves, pull them out by their edges, cram them down, and then stand pecking at the empty bowls, whilst hawks watch them from above.

And as I too watch the birds I memorise, meditate, try to think things out. Is it all a nightmare, or have I been taken prisoner by savages? How comes it about that some men may do precisely what they like, and other men may do nothing? How come *they* to be free, and *I* to be powerless? How come such fellows to have power to deprive me of my possessions, to thrust me into a dungeon, even, some day, to kill me—as they have done already for all intents and purposes? Oh, it passes my comprehension! And does it pass my comprehension because I am become as brutish as they, and have forgotten how to use my brain? Yet to use one's brain nowadays would be waste of time. Once I used it—and all that has come of my using it is that I and my poor poultry are landed in our present predicament!

Lialia's tireless voice reaches me again. It comes to me like a signal call, despite that her cry of "Ai-ei-a-ai!", a cry not unlike the peacock's desert utterance, is feebler now than it used to be.

The reason of her call is that she has sighted a hawk above the ravine. As autumn draws on the hawks grow bolder.

Yet though Lialia's call is feeble, it can be heard for many versts around, and echoes far over the sea and the outlying ravines. And the hawks know it as well as they know Lialia and her red skirt. Wherefore it is with fear and hatred in their cunning little eyes that they glare at her from the oaken coppices, and it would be with joy that they would rend her body and peck out the keen little pupils which can range not only the mountain-tops, but even the zenith itself. Also there exists a clear understanding between her and the local poultry—perhaps the more so because she herself bears a certain resemblance to a white pigeon. However that may be, no sooner does she send forth her shrilly call than from hill and dale there arises a perfect chorus of wing-flappings and cluckings, with Verba's chickens adding their tongues to those of the Ribachki poultry, and of the brood at "Tikhaia Pristan," and of the Pribytkovs' brood, and of the broods on the flats below us, and of the broods on the foothills, and of the broods around dead villas where the poultry are the only creatures remaining alive. It must have been with fear and trembling that the late owners hid away their birds against removal as "superfluities" in the same manner as "redundant" eggs, saucepans, sheets, linen and the rest! Yet apparently very many did succeed in thus concealing their birds—even though they did so but to leave the poor creatures to a life of constant dread of the hawks, winged scavengers of the air.

One such scavenger comes flying low over the ravine, with a sort of screwlike flight—the sun striking reflections from its wings as it travels. It flies thus until Lialia's tireless cry deflects its course, and convinces it that a wiser plan might be to seek temporary concealment amongst the oaks on the opposite slope.

And I too know the feeling with which poultry instinctively seek cover under brier-bushes, or beside walls, and then lie crouched against the shale with trembling bodies, jerking necks and shrinking, inverted eyes. Yes, I too know the fear

which can be inspired by certain brutish men (if really they are men), to such an extent that the victim can think but of creeping into a cleft and digging himself a grave. Yet whereas hawks may be forgiven, in that what they do is done only to gain for themselves bread of subsistence, the men of whom I speak lack even that excuse.

Thus poultry and human beings feeding upon leaves, and trembling in the presence of rapacious birds! And, even so, the quarry of the air's scavengers have the advantage, in that at least Lialia's voice can put those scavengers to flight, and her eyes reassure the threatened.

THE MEN "WHO GO ABOUT TO KILL"

Who comes riding from behind that ridge, and making for our knoll? The man of the splendid teeth, Shura the musician, Shura (to use his own term for himself) "the Kite"—a good enough name for him, seeing that he is just a scavenger and nothing else.

By whom was that scavenger created? O Lord, seeing that *Thou* didst create him, and endow him with Thy likeness, how comes he to call himself a kite when he is, at best, but a hawfinch? ¹

His docile steed bears him bravely over the hillocks. Yet the steed is panting and snorting, and has its head drooping, and its forelock plastered over its eyes, and its flanks heaving and running with sweat, and its legs feeling each successive ridge the more. But at least it carries the fellow along, and must be indeed a patient animal to carry him, as it does, up hill and down dale until its wind is exhausted. On its back Shura ascends Chatyr Dagh, and even penetrates to the summit of Demerdzhi.

As he draws near to where I am standing some instinct prompts me to seek cover behind a heap of shale. Why so? Is it that I am ashamed of my rags and toil, and feel annoyed because, just when I am crawling, staggering over the stones with a sackful of earth (would that my head were one of those sackfuls!), there should spring up from nowhere this mounted scavenger of the swarthy features and the flashing, snake-like teeth?

Jovially jerking his elbows, he shouts:

"God loves the man who toils!"

As though *he*, at the present time, ought to have the Divine Name on his lips!

And suddenly I realise why I had courted concealment. It

¹ A play upon words, since kite is *shura* and hawfinch *shur*.

had been because the scavenger had wafted to my nostrils the stench of the dustbin!

Well-dressed, though, is Shura. He has a good jacket upon him when everyone else is wearing rags. And he is sleek and plump and well-filled out when everyone else is sunken of eye, and blurred and wasted of feature. And he has a horse to ride upon when everyone else is almost crawling upon all-fours. Oh, friend Shura is a very fine fellow indeed!

For three years past I have known the man. Formerly he lived in "Chaika," that villa on the hill. There he played the piano, and there he consorted with the local gentry, with those peaceable, humdrum folk who used to go down through the ravines to bathe, and to rhapsodise over the mountains ("How be-e-aautiful they are!"), and to exchange "good day's," and who paid their bills with conscientious regularity. Also "Chaika" was a villa devoted to the cult of youth, and perpetually humming with gay young women—with lady doctors, lady artists, and the rest—ladies of the type who visited the district because they had been told that a summer holiday would be good for their health.

✓ But one day there came to our town men of the sort "who go about to kill." And as they were temporarily weary of killing, they asked the lady artists to—to play to them, and to sing. . . . Bah!

"Nice-looking, lively young women is what we want."

So they were given the lady artists, the lady doctors.

"And blood as well."

So blood also was given them—all the blood they wanted.

And since then, whilst everybody and everything else have been lying stricken to the ground, and consuming their all down to the last grass-blade, the "Kite" has been riding about the country. Not for nothing did he play the piano as he peered from his eyrie (carrion birds always like to perch on a height), seeing that since that time many and many a soul has gone northward to Kharkov. Not so, however, Shura. *He* is still battenning upon milk porridge, and playing the piano o' nights. Also his present abode is larger even than his former one, and in it he is entertaining fresh

young women. Also he now has a "salary" paid him in flour and salt and the like. In short, it is worth while sometimes to be a good player of the piano!

To the ravines again, in quest of more firewood ! For rather would I stow myself away at the bottom of some precipitous cleft, and for ever abide where no one and nothing are to be seen. As it happens, though, the poultry must be prevented from flying over into the vineyard. So, repairing thither, I seat myself upon a slope and relapse into a reverie. Have I really anything in my mind, though ? At first my mind remains a blank. And that is just as well, seeing that things to-day are what they will be to-morrow, and what they will be the next day, and the next, and the next, and so on for ever. No, I merely sit looking at the sun much as I shall be looking at it when my glazed eyes shall have come to reflect it only as a pewter spoon. But also I gaze hungrily upon the real, the living sun because all too soon will the winds be blowing, and sheets of rain falling, and storms venting their thunder, and devils beating tattoos upon my dwelling—shaking it—dancing madly upon its roof. . . . And how then shall we fare—how shall we spend the long time over our morsel of fire ? True, savages can live happy, contented lives, even though they possess nothing, know nothing, are lettered in nothing: but then savages have nothing to lose. . . . When the storm winds come, are we to read books ? No. Our books, read every one of them already, are lying piled in a corner. And books relate too much to an order of life which, so far as we are concerned, has been stamped underground, and can never have another order of the sort succeed it, seeing that no system of civilisation could ever follow this restoration of the cave life of our ancestors.

How constantly, nevertheless, my books return to my mind ! Never can I enter our little dwelling, and see them lying in their recess like so many deserted orphans, but a thrill passes through me. For from the first they had been our travelling companions. Also there came a day when, like so

many other things, they were nearly "dispatched northward," and had outstretched to them "the bloody hand."

When was that? A little more than a year ago, on a day of cold, and of pouring rain, such as black Babugan often sends us in the winter-time. And I remember the day the better because on that day I saw, for the first time, some derelict horses shivering on those foothills—later, one by one, to fall down dead, and leave their bones to be bleached by the sun. Through the rain, that day, there came to the town some of the men "who go about to kill." And they did so much of their special work in these parts, both on this side of the mountains and on the other side, and along the coast, that at last the workers themselves grew weary. For, you see, in addition to slaughter-houses having first to be set apart, the work had to be done with great exactness, so that thereafter balances might be struck, and grand totals rendered to the senders of the killers, and certain items carefully omitted, and, in general, those senders given good proof of their emissaries' mettle, and of the thoroughness and tirelessness with which the region had been subjected to the "iron broom." And to effect all that many, very many persons had to be killed: in fact over 120,000—done to death in the local slaughter-houses.

The precise totals of the daily slaughterings in the abattoirs of Chicago are not known to me; but this I do know, that here the task was simpler, in that nought but the actual killing and burying had to be done. And in time even the burying became simplified and the ravines for their part became choked with corpses. And in time, again, further simplification led to corpses being cast into the sea. And all to fulfil the will of men who had discovered the secret of human happiness, and found it to lie in wholesale human slaughter.

The time which the discoverers of this secret appointed for the slaughtering was night-time. And by day they drank and slept, whilst those others, the folk lying in the cellars, waited—waited. Yes, they waited in companies as large as whole army corps, in companies of young and old and middle-aged, in companies of human beings still having warm, living blood

in their veins, in companies of human beings of whom many had themselves meted out death—but only in fair fight, only in defence of their country and Europe on battlefields of Prussia, Austria and the Russian steppes. Huddled together in cellars they lay—packed close, and starved, so that their strength might be reduced before they should be taken out and shot.

Thus, on a rainy winter's morning, with clouds veiling the sun, the Crimea's cellars had crammed into them tens, of thousands of souls previously marked out, set aside, for massacre. And above those souls' heads the "men who go about to kill" drank and slept. And before those men stood tables heaped with packets of tabs. And on each such tab stood the red capital letter which spelt doom for some soul during the coming night. That letter, the letter R, begins the two beloved words "Russia" and "Fatherland." But also it begins the two fatal words signifying "Dispatch" and "To be shot."¹ Unfortunately, the terms "Russia" and "Fatherland" have no meaning for the "men who go about to kill." No longer does a shadow of doubt of that remain.

Early the same morning someone knocked at my own door. "They who go about to kill," was it? No, it was a man of peace, a lame architect so mastered by his terror as to have undertaken menial work on the killers' behalf.

I sit here now, on the slope of my vineyard ravine—I sit and gaze at the sun-bathed mountains, and wonder whether they are mountains in reality, or whether they are mountains of a world long vanished. And as I do so my recollections of the day of which I speak come flooding back upon me.

"I have but called to pay you my respects," the architect said awkwardly. But he did not look at me as he spoke. "What terrible weather, is it not? And how high up your place stands! Well, I have—er, I have been instructed to list your books, and remove them. For you see all, all—all books have to be—I, er—I understand that——"

As the wretched man spoke the sweat was fairly running down his face. In return for this work, I knew, he received

¹ *Rossia, Rodina, Raskhod and Rasstriel.*

daily a ration of half a pound of straw-made bread. That was his "salary." Yet also I knew that he had undertaken the work less for the "salary" than because of the ungovernable drive of his access of terror. For before now he had confessed as much to me with his own lips—confessed that he was acting as he was doing for fear of denunciation to the "Military Tribunal." . . . Ah, that dread sentence, "To be shot forthwith!"

And even now the rounded, birdlike eyes that were staring at me were charged full with horror.

"I know," I replied. "And the same with sewing-machines and bicycles. But I haven't exactly got a library—only a Testament, and a few books written by myself."

"Well, *I* cannot see the necessity of it, any more than you do; but——"

An architect, a practiser of an art, he had felt that it would not be safe even to pass over a brother artist, and, though lame, had come through mire and rain, over hill and down vale, to destroy that fellow-artist's soul! . . . Well, no. After all, he had only done it because driven to bay.

"I too cannot see the necessity of it. But at least give me a *list* of the books, and write upon it (after all, you are only a 'doubtful' case) that you personally will be answerable for the books' safe custody if allowed to remain."

I, *I* was personally to be answerable for my books' safe custody, for the safe custody of books which I had written with my own hand! Was everyone gone mad?

However, the architect would not depart without the list—his tongue implored it, and so did the eyes which found it so hard to meet mine. Also there was his lameness. So eventually the list was given him.

But ever since it has hurt me when I have looked at the dim corner devoted to my little pile of "educational works." Never, in particular, can I see my beloved Testament without feeling that once I nearly betrayed *Him*.

And the rain that day was such as even to veil the mountains behind swirling wreaths of vapour. And under it all, on those foothills yonder, some derelict horses stood patiently

awaiting the moment when they should drop in their tracks. . . . Ah, that architect, walking from lonely villa to lonely villa to collect books! Ah, the people everywhere seeking any sort of a cleft or cranny to thrust their heads into! What a nightmare it was—what a nightmare!

But away with such thoughts! The sun now has risen high, and is burning the skin, and turning the shimmering mountain-peaks faintly blue, and bringing them to life, making them seem to waver to and fro, making them seem to stare back at the shining, silver-fretted waters. Nevertheless, the sun is also warping and drying up my cucumbers, and making their yellow tissues split. Also the sun is discolouring my tomatoes. And by now the poultry have betaken themselves to a ravine; the peacock is standing in the shade of its villa, and shrilling its morning call; and the empty-uddered Tamarka keeps issuing from nowhere, crossing the road, and wandering about the knoll.

"Oh, little Torpedka! Why have *you* not gone with the rest?"

Torpedka is pecking about near a ridge of shale. She is doing so feebly, and her eyes are more prominent than they ought to be. I know that sign. It means that she too is—passing. I take her into my hands. Oh, the feather-weight, to be sure! Well—perhaps it is better so. . . . Little Torpedka, turn your eyes to the sun. Never have you known what he is, but always you have been accustomed to love him. And gaze also at the mountains, at their peaks now turning from brown to blue. Never have you known what *they* are, but always you have accepted the fact of their being there. And look also towards that great big place, towards that great, big, desolate sheet of azure over there. What is *it*? That great big place is the sea—again something which has never been known to you. Lastly, let *me* look at your little eyes. What, oh, what, is that glint in them? Can it be the sun? Yes, it is the sun, but not the same sun as can be seen shining up there—only the cold, empty sun to be discerned in eyes which are turning to pewter plates. . . . For that pewter sun is the *Sun*

of the Dead. . . . Nevertheless, Torpedka, we must not blame the real sun. No, nor yet yourself. . . . Oh, how your head is drooping! . . . Fortunate are you, Torpedka. At least you are passing away in kind hands. And as softly, softly I sing to you, "Farewell, O sun of my life!" let us remember the very many souls who used to love the sun as you have done, but since have been forced to go hence in darkness, and with no loving lips to whisper comfort, and no beloved, caressing hand to still the departure's agony. . . . Fortunate indeed you are, Torpedka!

And the poor little mite quietly expires. . . .

The time is noon. Taking my spade, I repair to a quiet corner near my garden fence where the sun strikes flashes from an outcrop of ridge. In that corner I dig a hole. And in that hole, then, I very carefully, and with a murmur of farewell, place the tiny body. Which done, I fill up the hole—fill it up very quickly. . . .

Oh, you folk in comfortable chairs, I know that you will smile at all this. I feel that you will exclaim: "The sentimentality of such proceedings!"

Well, do so. You will not hurt me. Smile if you wish, and go on puffing at your cigars, and disporting yourselves in life's resounding waters. Your words will but trickle away into an empty drain. For I know you well, and can picture you poring over the crisp pages of your favourite journal, and believing its every word about us. I know something else also. I know that very likely you have glimmering in *your* eyes the pewter Sun of the Dead, the sun which never glows to life in actuality, and has a moment ago faded out in the eyes of a creature of less understanding even than *you* may possess. . . . One word more, too. *You* killed my Torpedka. Yes, *you*! . . . Ah! You do not understand. Go on puffing at your cigars!

TALES OF A FOSTER-MOTHER

WHEN is the sun going to seek its nightly resting-place behind Babugan? May it be soon, so that night may fall, and the stars seemingly descend into the sea as so many spangle-points, and float there, and these villas and foothills and ravines become blotted out from my vision, and only the foreground of my garden remain dimly visible as a threshold to the sea's star-flecked blackness. For always, on the fall of night, I can fancy myself at length to be living amid a watery waste like Robinson Crusoe's, and forget everything save that illusion. At least on Robinson Crusoe's island no one would ever come to disturb me, and seek to crush out my soul; whilst for companions I should have for choice not human beings at all—they would have ceased to exist for me—but these kindly poultry, that peacock, a few birds of paradise, some of those green humming-birds which I see darting hither and thither over the shale cliffs, and a selection of the jays which are screeching in the morning sunshine.

Nevertheless one's best efforts cannot shut out reality. Even as I write I hear footsteps approaching my fence. The day has begun badly indeed!

"Good morning, *barin*!"

This visitor is one for whom, alone of all my acquaintance, the term "*barin*" has not yet become a term of ridicule. But even she uses the term rather through habit than for any other reason. The visitor in question is the foster-mother from the hill above. Presently she emerges from behind the hedge, and as she does so I perceive her to totter a little. Her costume is ragged, her feet are wrapped in a pair of dish-clouts, and her arms laden with sticks and the stem of an old tobacco-pipe—articles picked up on the way on the principle that at any moment a given thing may come in handy. And her face is so yellow and pinched, and her

eyes so sunken, that her features are like the features of a patient leaving hospital after a long illness.

The reason of her coming I know to be a desire to relieve herself to me with an outpouring of her wrongs, and I know that I must listen. Sprung from the people, she speaks with a speech sometimes lapsing into popular diction.

"What is going to become of us?" she begins. "Bread has risen to 12,000 roubles a pound in the bazaar, and there isn't any at that. Everyone is wasting away."

Her eyes are distended with anguish and a mute appeal. Yet what can I reply?

"I poke about, but everyone is sitting by empty stalls in Yalta, and weeping and dying. What is the meaning of it? And would you believe it, but folk are being stopped in the Pass, and stripped of everything that can be exchanged in the steppe country! In the steppe country too, they say, famine has broken out. What is going to be the end of it? Once the steppe peasants used to come crowding into Yalta to sell their stuff—I knew them do it for years; but now, see for yourself how things stand! Even the fishermen, open-handed though they are, have nothing to sell. For what would be the good of catching fish *now*?¹ All that the fishermen say is, 'Wait a bit. Wait till the spring. *Then*, perhaps, we shall catch something.' 'Wait till the spring!' Wait till doomsday!"

Shura saunters into view from behind a hillock. After surveying sea and mountain for a moment he produces a cigarette-case of silver, takes thence a scented cigarette, lights up, and resumes his stroll with his short-strided gait. The old lady eyes him fixedly as he crosses the foreground. She compresses her lips, and at length ejaculates:

"Why, he is growing quite stout, almost fit to burst! And who wouldn't if they had three jugfuls of milk a day, and poultry, and eggs, and—— But how comes he to get hold of such things when here are you and I just perishing of hunger,

¹ As will be seen later, this is a reference to the fact that the local Bolshevik authorities had taken to commandeering the bulk of the catches for themselves and their friends.

and unable even to earn a *kopek*? Yet I remember summer seasons when one could take in the villa folk's washing, and earn two roubles a day by that alone. Aye, and once the bazaar always had plenty of stuff in it. In those days one could buy as much snipe, and lard, and eggs (brown and white) as one wanted. And the bread that there used to be! Such beautiful soft bread it was!"

The mainspring of the old lady's tedious discourse is, as I have said, a yearning for a "true word," for something which she can believe. Of that I am well aware. But I have no such "word" at my disposal. Rather, I would gladly get rid of "words" altogether, and so sever the last link between humanity and myself. ✓

Nevertheless she continues:

"One day I went to work in what they call 'The Soviet Gardens,' and for my trouble I was given half a pound of bread. And *what* bread! It was just chaff. And half a bottle of wine. But no money, as money hadn't yet been printed. Says the man to me—you know the way those fellows talk, 'Oh, once we get started with the printing, there'll be cash for everyone, and to spare!' But suppose we're all dead first? And anyway, what is half a pound of bread for three souls, for the little ones and me? And as for the half-bottle of wine given to workers in 'The Soviet Gardens,' why, it just makes one tipsy, that's all: one is too empty *not* to get tipsy. And to babies too they give wine, and all our young fellows they're making into tavern drunkards as a regular thing. Oh, I wish I was dead—that I do!"

Then I give her a "true word." I say:

"Soon *all* of us will be dead."

Whereupon, flinging down her faggot, she explodes with:

"Then I say that it is a shame. And with nothing to show for it all, either! Look at the things they promised us! Then look at the way in which we still have to fend for ourselves as best we can! Oh, I'm not thinking of myself, for in my opinion old folk can scrape along somehow. No, indeed! But *those*, but *those*——! . . . And my landlady too has lost her all, and is wasting away." ✓

Then, after a cautious glance to each side of her, the old lady continues in a voice lowered to a whisper:

"Do you know, yesterday a commissar was killed in the Pass! Lialia heard the news when she was in Yalta. It was our commissar of supplies. Seemingly he was driving to the mainland with money for the bank when some men with rifles rushed out of the forest. Regular desperate fellows they were—fellows who would stick at nothing. 'Greens,' maybe. Wrangelites, maybe. But in any case they won't confess who they are. And these men cried to the commissar, 'Halt you! Your name is Ershev, isn't it?' Oh, *they* knew all about him! But they didn't touch his wife and children. They just told them to get out of sight. And when the commissar had scrambled out of the car the men tied him to it, poured some stuff over him, and set him alight. And they say that he and the car *did* blaze! What the men said was, 'We are for the rights of the people. Yes, we know everything.'—Think of it!"

Again the old lady's eyes gaze at me tensely, eagerly. And again I have no "true word" to offer.

"And just now, when I was crossing the ridge near the overseer's villa, near to where one of the horses fell last winter, I saw some boys, and thought to myself: 'What can they be doing with the horse's carcass?' Then I looked again. And this time I saw that they were lying on their stomachs, and sucking at one of the carcass's hoofs! Aye, they were sucking and gnawing at it, and growling! It turned me sick to see them. ✓ They were doing just what the dogs do. In fact, if you'll pardon plain speaking, everything rose in me until—well, I vomited, even though I had not had a bite to eat this day. For what a sight it was!—Oh, and do you know, my beautiful velvet carpet has had to go for three pounds of barley! And then there's to-morrow to think of. I would rather be dead!"

Wringing her hands, she gathers together her sticks, and makes as though to depart—rises with a tottering and a stumbling. Has she then not realised, even yet, that before long she will have to cook porridge with blood-stained grain? But perhaps she *has* realised the fact. At all events I seem

to remember that that day her eyes had in them more than usual horror. And but a little while ago she was talking of her foster-daughter going to glean wheat on the steppes, and of seeing villas and vineyards distributed to herself and every other worker, and of the workers' lives becoming like the lives of the *ci-devant* gentry, and of "everything going to be ours," merely because at a meeting a sailor had bawled out the "true speech": "Comrades and fellow-workers! We have exterminated the bourgeois. Even such of them as at first escaped have now been drowned. Accordingly, the Soviet Power, the system known as 'Communism,' has become the one Power having authority in this land, and thereby our every desire has been attained, and each one of us is going to have a motor-car of his own, and a five-storied villa to live in, and a rose-garden to sniff at!"

Of all of which the only true portion was that he and his had seized anything and everything that they could, and dispossessed the rightful owners of the neighbourhood's gardens, vineyards and villas.

"Oh, and I forgot to say," the old lady adds, "that Ivan Mikhailitch sends you his compliments, and would like to call upon you some day. You see, I met him in the bazaar as I was coming along. But, do you know, I should scarcely have known him, so ragged and dirty he was, with only a couple of dish-clouts on his feet, and his legs scarcely able to move him even with the help of a stick. The meeting with him happened like this. In the bazaar I saw what I took to be a little old beggar-man of a fellow. Standing beside a stall kept by a Greek this old beggar-man was. And only when he saluted the Greek, and the Greek replied, 'Gospodin Professor, help yourself,' and the little old beggar-man put into his basket three nuts and two other things, did I see, Ho-o-oly Mother, that it was Ivan Mikhailitch! And he, once, with *such* a villa—in the days, that is, when I used to do his and his family's washing for them! And *such* a study too—a study all full of books, with himself always writing! Well, he is half dead with hunger now, and has aged terribly. But he recognised me all the same, and said, 'Timofevna, see how they have

rewarded me for my literary labours! The pension that they have given me is a pension fit only for a sparrow.' Aye, that is exactly what he said to me. And that 'sparrow's pension' is—what do you think? Why, a twelfth of a pound of bread. Just that! And he went on, 'I have the actual State-sealed document with me,' and pulls out a bit of a paper, and shows it to the Greek. And the Greek (who had never once stopped bowing and scraping) takes it, and looks at it. Then he read it aloud, and folk came up to listen. And the pension sure enough was for a thousand roubles monthly—bread standing, as you know, at twelve thousand roubles the pound! What a mockery, *isn't* it? Then some of the bystanders began to talk, and at once there comes up a fellow with a rifle. Says he to Ivan, 'What are you doing, you old devil?' (though, begging your pardon, 'devil' wasn't exactly the word that he used). 'Are you poking fun at the authorities when, as a matter of fact, you ought long ago to have been turned into carrion instead of being allowed to go on grabbing the people's food?' And with that he drove us away, the upstart brute, and even threatened some of us with the cellar! To think of what Ivan's villa used to be!"

And so the old lady takes her departure.

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Shall I go to the ravine again, and do more of that eternal chopping? I can hear the peacock calling. Also the sun has an air as though he would like to set behind Babugan forthwith, but feels that he ought not to. Then to me comes the Glutton. She scans my hands, and I say to her, "As it happens, I *have* got a little crumbled almond for you, and what is more, am ready to tell you a story. But first you must come and sit down with me."

Then seating myself at the edge of the ravine, and observing her quietly, I settle her upon my knees, and she returns the gaze with a cocked-upward eye.

"Listen, little one. Once there lived a man called Ivan Mikhailitch. He wrote books to increase your and my wisdom, and in particular a book concerning a man named Lomo-

nosov—of whom probably you know about as much as does our good Madame Timofevna. Not that you are not as wise as most other little Russian pullets, even though at this moment your mind *does* seem to be set upon nothing but getting hold of another bit of almond. And in any case you are in every way a most respect-worthy pullet, and by Christmas-time may have laid for me at least one little egg. . . . What? Do not go to sleep, little pet! However, I know why you are doing that. I know that you are doing so because, even though you cannot talk—and how I wish that you could!—you are a chicklet of pride. . . . Sleep, then, for I know also (and know it only too well) that that drowsiness is due to hunger. . . . Well, once our Ivan Mikhailitch wrote a book concerning Lomonosov, and got a prize for the book. He got that prize because once, O Glutton, we had in Russia an *Academy of Sciences* to which the youth of the bourgeoisie came, and which would boast of every sort of a Chair— But I am forgetting myself, forgetting that you do not walk sufficiently far afield to know that the Chair which gave Ivan Mikhailitch his gold medal for the book on Lomonosov was a *Chair of Learning*, even though by now, in all probability, Ivan has bartered the medal either for a sack of the Greek's nuts or for a *pud* of some Tartar's flour. . . . But how light you have grown, even as has Ivan Mikhailitch, who has left to him, for his sole remaining possessions, Lomonosov on the brain, and licence to join you and me in scouring the ravines. . . . At first, though, the authorities paid him generously for his task of writing. They let him have a monthly pension of as much as a faggot of wood and a twelfth of a pound of bread! . . . What has frightened you so? That was only Lialia screeching. Sleep, and do not tremble. . . . Yes, they let Ivan Mikhailitch have a monthly pension of a faggot of wood and a twelfth of a pound of bread. And the faggot pleased him, for he is an old man now, and felt that for him to have gone on writing about Lomonosov in the winter-time without fuel, or only with fuel gathered by scouring the ravines (which in any case he couldn't have done), would have been impossible. . . . But one day the authorities ceased

to let Ivan have either his faggot or his morsel of bread: and since already pupils had become unobtainable, Ivan began to grow hungry—very hungry indeed. At length, therefore, he composed a petition, and presented it to the authorities. And at length to that petition he has received an answer. The answer has, in place of his former pension, assigned him a pension of three *zlotniki* of bread a day. Personally I think, as also will you, that the personage whom the authorities had in mind when they allotted that pension was not Ivan at all, but a certain wise little pullet who is living and starving here with myself, seeing that three *zlotniki* of bread a day is your daily consumption—though, even at that, none too much for a chicklet's support. But you would have been proud of that pension, would you not? . . . Now, the story having been told, run away and resume your promenading. Liarva, see, is doing that finely. So go and walk about like her."

This last is because tottering about on the peacock's domain beyond the ravine there is a lame skeleton, buff of colour. The skeleton intermittently takes a step forward, halts, sniffs at the hot, parched, jagged stones, moves forward again, comes to more stones and more sharp yellow prickles, lifts its head, and gazes in the direction of the sea's empty void of blue. And when it turns aside, its gauntly ribbed flanks show in the sunlight as burnished copper.

That skeleton is a mare named Liarva. Her home is the villa in which old Kulesh is converting scrap-iron into stoves for conveyance to the steppes, and reconversion into potatoes. Yet it is long now since her master put harness upon her back, for the reason that she broke down badly last spring, when drawing her late master's wasted body to the grave, and now has become a confirmed invalid. And the reason why the poor old creature steps so carefully is that she dreads a fall. Once she were to fall, never would she get up again. And Bielka, one of Verba's dogs, is aware of that. Already he is eyeing her from a drainhole—eyeing her as though he were catching from her a certain scent.

And oh! those flying horses of last winter—some of the many which the Volunteer Army had to abandon when it

passed across the sea! How well I remember that company of grey and bay and black and piebald horses, of full-grown chargers, and of animals only of the size of cobs! For several weeks, during that time of drenching rain, did those horses roam the vineyards, the ravines, the waste places, the roads—breaking down barbed-wire fences of gardens as they did so, and slashing their bellies in the process. And at last they took merely to standing still—to standing and waiting in hope, perhaps, that even yet someone would arrive to deliver them. But no one ever did arrive to do so, for everyone would have been afraid to take such a step—and in any case, who would have wanted to keep a horse just when winter was coming on, and fodder had become unprocurable? And at times the horses would approach some ruined villa, and hang their heads over its fence as though saying: “Take us in, we beg of you! Under our feet are thorns and the cold rock. Over us are clouds and rain, for winter is at hand and already casting its snows upon Chatyr Dag. Take us in, we beg of you!”

Every morning I would awaken to see them standing on those foothills—sometimes in one spot, sometimes in another, but at last in the same spot always, with their half-dead, half-alive bodies and wind-tossed manes and tails making them look like equine statues in iron or stone or bronze against the mountains’ brown or the sea’s blue-blackness. And then, one by one, they began to fall, and every morning I would perceive their number to be smaller, and the number of overhead circling kites and vultures to be larger, and the same with the number of dogs devouring fallen ones before life was yet extinct. The animal to hold himself up the longest was a great black, upstanding charger which at one time must have formed one of a gun-team. So far as I could distinguish things, the cause of his death was that inadvertently he happened to ascend a ridge which, sheer above the centre of a ravine, ran out knife-edged to a point, so that on reaching this point the horse could neither advance farther nor retreat, but had perforce to remain standing exactly where he was. And so he stood for several days and several

nights—never daring to lie down meanwhile, but only to splay his legs outwards in order at least to maintain his balance. But at last, one day, a strong north-easterly wind arose, and the horse, impotent as ever to turn himself round, had to remain facing it head-on. . . . The last that I saw was that suddenly his four legs all gave way together—and down he went. And, down, he just drew up his legs once and stretched himself out.

Therefore, if now you were to go to that ridge, and look upon its townward side, you would find his bones, the bones of that splendid great artillery teamster, bleaching in the sun. . . .

At length approaching her villa, Liarva halts beside its verandah. The clump of vinegar-shoots around that verandah is splaying at its stems exactly as the artillery horse did with his legs, in an evident determination, like the horse, not to give in. And Liarva will remain there until her master arrives to admit her, whilst in the meantime the peacock struts behind her with intermittent glances at her wisp of a tail, and desultory peckings at the ground.

Which picture is the picture to be seen everywhere.

And still the shadows of the clouds are sporting over the mountains, and variously lightening or darkening their slopes.

BABA-YAGA

FROM the spot where I am sitting a great black cliff falls to a cove washed by the murmuring tide. All the cove is visible to me, with some decaying, lugubrious-looking villas facing its strand. Originally those villas were raised to serve as a reward for lifelong toil, as homes of ease for declining years, so that everywhere the cove became known as "The Professors' Haven," and harboured retired sages who devoted their intellects to wrest gardens from the stony face of Nature and grow roses in them. But where now are those builders of villas, and all that band of lawyers and doctors and tutors who came to this wild, fresh, ancient land of the Tartars for rest from life's labours, short-sighted, simple-minded men too polite even to address a piece of quartz in the second person singular, kept knavish gardeners, and naïvely paid money to rascals and cheats, and would go into raptures when Venus traversed the sun's disk, and advocated Vitalism, or Mechanism, or some other such cult, and knew all about porphyrite and diorite, and thought out hypotheses, and probed the world's every secret? Unfortunately, my good professors, my devisors of villas and vineyards, no one enlisted your help when it was determined to unearth other secrets of this region, and your *dvorniki*¹ at length felt emboldened to trundle your writing-tables and chairs, and even your bedsteads and basins, off to the bazaar, and the lame architect called upon you to sequester your books, and your gardeners purloined your deck-chairs and folding-seats, and breeched themselves with the canvas of your garden tents! No, indeed! All that happened then was that your little earthly paradises fell shattered before the blows of grimy fists. So where are you now, you absent-minded dreamers?

Some of those who had eyes to see got away. Others are

¹ Lodgekeepers, concierges.

lying in the ground. A few still are giving "popular readings" in return for a pittance of dried fish and salt and tobacco.

And those villas, those villas! Do you see that grey cottage there, the cottage with the red-tiled roof? One day that cottage saw haled from its door seven unsuspecting naval officers—to be dragged thence to the mountains and "dispatched northward." And in the next villa, the white cot which looks so peaceful amongst its surrounding cypress-trees, there once dwelt a little old fellow who, an ex-civil-servant, had developed a taste for sitting by the sea and catching bullheads. Whenever his five-year-old grandson brought him a pebble, and cried: "Grandpapa, look at this carnelian!" the old gentleman would reply:

"'Carnelian?' Nay, it is not a carnelian, but a bit of felspar."

"Felspar? Then, Grandpapa, what is carnelian *like*?"

"What is it like? Why, it is like thy little eyes—clear like thy little eyes. Now go and look for just such a real carnelian whilst I catch another bullhead. . . . Oh, see the rascal even now!"

Early in the morning, also, just when tobacco tastes its sweetest, the old gentleman was wont to gird a straw wallet about him and set forth in search of cucumbers and tomatoes in the bazaar. And so it befell that one day he and his wallet came to grief. For just as the old simpleton was starting out, and admiring the sea, and sending up tobacco-rings as blue as the sea itself, some men brought him to a halt—men bearing red stars on their caps.

"Halt, old fool!" they said. "What is that grey cloak that you're wearing? Is it a military cloak, the property of a refugee?"

"Oh no, my good sirs! It is only an old cloak of my own. I used to be a civil-servant, and am wearing it only so as to wear it out entirely."

"And what are you now?"

"Now? Oh, nothing in particular. I just catch a few bullheads, and sometimes visit the bazaar as you see me doing,

and live upon a White Cross pension, since by birth I am a Free Cossack."

"A Cossack of the Don? Then follow us at once."

Thus the old fellow and his wallet found themselves arrested. And after that the old fellow had been thrust into a cellar for a while, he was taken to the mountains, stripped of shabby cloak and frayed shirt, and—given one in the neck.¹

The little grandson wept in the bereaved villa. The whole family mourned. For no longer was there anyone either to catch bullheads or to buy tomatoes. Yet did the little grandson do rightly in weeping as he did, seeing the reason for which the old man had been arrested?—The moral is that, when setting forth upon a tomato-purchasing expedition, it is wrong for one to wear a cloak! ✓

And such things are done everywhere. . . .

But look at those villas again. In particular, look at that one nestling amongst Kastel's vineyards. The distance between it and here is three versts at least, but the villa stands out plainly against its backing of dark cliff. And the views, the lovely seascapes that one gets thence! And the air that there is there! Also, inasmuch as the villa has for its foundations a warm bed-rock of diorite, its snowdrops, those pure white porcelain flowers of Kastel, bloom a whole week earlier than do snowdrops elsewhere—even as also do its vines and its violets. The mornings that I have spent there! The songs that its blackbirds warble during the scented months of spring! And, withal, it is a quiet spot, since no one ever passes that way, and to no one does it occur to visit it for a day's outing. Verily, therefore, it is peace's own dwelling-place.

But yesterday some people did resort to it. And those people were men with blackened faces. To prevent the outcry from reaching the ears of Kastel, they began by making the womenfolk stand with their faces to a wall. And then they went through the place to the last fragment, and bade the women farewell, as they departed, by striking them with the butt-ends of rifles.

To-night those men are just beyond that hillock yonder. . . .

¹ Shot through the back of the neck.

To my ears comes a humming, a crackling, as of something rushing through the woods on Kastel's heights. Can it be a motor-car bound for Yalta? Yes, in very truth a motor-car is smoking along the invisible road there. So motor-cars still exist to be ridden in? Yes—when "business" is afoot.

In a weariness of langour I close my eyes, and listen to the machine's undulant humming. Oh, the horrible clatter of it! One would think that the mountains themselves were falling! Also there is in my ears a sound as of a rumbling waterfall, and in my head a swimming as of an imminent swoon. But the fact seems in no way strange to me, for in these days *nothing* seems strange.

Raising myself on my elbows, I gaze at the mountains. And it becomes borne in upon me, as I contemplate their soughing, slumberous verdure, that the sun now is dimming his brightness, and rendering objects duller to my vision, and throwing Babugan's crest into shadow as though the mountain were falling asleep, and causing the densely wooded foothills to take on an appearance of drowsiness. Very ancient must be the woods and thickets on those foothills. Their roots, the roots which I dig up to grind into meal, lie splayed far outwards. And what a picture of somnolence it all makes! Meanwhile a cool breeze is blowing from those timbered peaks. Verily it might be the breath of a mountain cellar. And the density of the woodlands there is, seemingly, such that only a tooth of ivory could gnaw, could hack a way through it. Again, as I sit listening, I hear a murmuring, humming, undulant echo traversing the black oaken bosage. Can it be Baba-Yaga on her iron mortar, her iron pestle-stick, as, hustling along, her iron broom sweeps for her a trackway? Yes, undoubtedly it is Baba-Yaga, the witch of the folk-tales!

Those black, accursed words "with an iron broom"! Never do they cease to ring in my head. But who first uttered them, who was the one to say, "Let all the Crimea be swept with an iron broom"? I shudder, and strive to recall the words' origin. It is not so very long ago that they were uttered. With blinking eyes, I wrestle with the sense of faintness that is overpowering me. Meanwhile the vanished sun's scarlet after-

glow is throwing the edges of Kush Kai's shimmering, hazy wall into sharp relief as the motor-car hurtles along towards Yalta.

The scene before me is like a scene in a folk-tale.

Unfortunately it is not a scene in a folk-tale, but a scene of stark reality, a scene that must be accepted.

Now I remember when I heard the words. For not long ago a radiogram came flying a thousand versts hither, alighted beside those blue waters yonder, and said:

"Be the Crimea swept, from sea to sea, with an iron broom."

It has been so swept. . . .

So over ravine and forest Baba-Yaga goes plying her besom of metal in the shape of the "business" motor-car which is crackling its way to Yalta. Nowadays "business" alone brings motor-cars afield. . . .

And the men who are riding in that car are known to me.

Men they are with backs as broad as paving-stones, and necks of the thickness of bullocks', and eyes as heavy as lead, and chaps all blood-shot and greasy and sated, and bale-like hands which can slay merely with a blow of the flat. Yet the same men can look quite different, and then they have backs as narrow as dorsal fins, and necks as slender and stringy as stretched cords, and eyes as sharp as augers, and hands spread and tenacious like sucker-studded tentacles.

Thus the motor-car plies its "iron broom," and bounds along towards Yalta. And with the sound the mountains seem to whirl about me, and the sea to draw back, and the forest to stand agape. Surely, too, the sun is watching the car, and saying to himf: "Aha! There goes Baba-Yaga—flogging her steeds with her pestle-stick, and clearing for herself a trackway!" For surely the sun knows every folk-tale.

And Kush Kai, turning from pink to white, seems to be dropping a tear, and recording yet another entry upon its placard-face—an entry which one day will be read.

ANOTHER VISITOR

FOOTSTEPS again! Truly this is a day of days!

Yes, someone as he skirts the brier-hedge and approaches the gate is coughing a senile cough. And then there appears, oh, such an extraordinary figure! Do I really behold in that figure the doctor?

Yes, it *is* the doctor, but at the same time a scarecrow of a doctor with a piece of sacking around his neck for a scarf, and a fancy, variegated garment around his legs by way of trousers. Michael Vasilievitch by name, he is always recognisable by the white umbrella which he carries. He carries it not because it is white (as a matter of fact, it is almost wholly a patchwork of sacking), but because it *is* an umbrella, and therefore a help towards preserving him from being looked upon as a pauper. Curious, is it not, to be in receipt of a pension, and at the same time have absolutely nothing? But in these days anything and everything is possible.

Yes, the doctor. But not the doctor who has had a kitchen cup broken by my turkey-hen. *He* lives on the hill up there. Rather, it is the other, the "lower" doctor, the doctor inhabiting that almond orchard on the flats. . . . Once that orchard was a picture indeed, and for forty years the home of Michael Vasilievitch, his wife, an imbecile son, and an old serving-woman. For employment he had vegetarianism and chemistry, and, for the subject of his dietetic experiments, his family! Oh, he is indeed an oddity!

"Well?" is my greeting to him, and he replies:

"Good day to you. Once more, as you see, I am here. What a nice place yours is—so high up, so retired, with not a sound to trouble you!"

"Is a sound to be heard *anywhere* now?"

"Oh yes! I hear plenty of them. But perhaps that is because for neighbours I have the seamen stationed to watch

the sea from the look-out post. From *them* comes any amount of talk. Yes, and good, mouth-filling talk at that, talk to make one realise that at times our tongue of Russia can be a very fine, bold speech-vehicle indeed. But here, I suppose, you are quite quiet. That is the best of living off a main road. I feel that if I lived here, with only the mountains and the sea and the sky for company, I could pray in complete comfort."

"Nevertheless, sounds do penetrate hither, doctor. And signals, too. But sit you down."

And as we seat ourselves on the terrace above the vineyard ravine we should make indeed a splendid subject for a photograph, a subject to make anyone possessed of a camera fetch it in haste! For are those two creatures above that Crimean dell flibberty-gibbets? Never, O foreign observer of the lounge-suit, of the smoking-suit, of the visiting-card, of the stroll-along avenue, or street, could you guess the truth—guess that the two flibberty-gibbets are, in reality, human beings. Why, to take our footwear alone, you can see that it was purchased either at Pironi's, or from the King of England's bootmaker, or from the establishment booting the French President, or from the Devil himself. Only thus could the doctor have come to be wearing, for shoes, strips of matting tied about with pieces of electric-bell wire, and soled with strips of tin!

Says he of those contrivances: "Maybe they do look queer, but at least they will last me for a month. The truth is that those Tartar longboots will not let me get my feet into them; whilst as for my boots and shoes from Europe, they—well, they have gone elsewhere. Oh, and have you heard how some fellows visited my place for a removal of all 'superfluities'? Truly fellows of the sort understand the art of skinning—their knowledge of it is first-rate! And all—for the sake of a free people'!"

News of the occurrence *had* reached my ears, and also news that recently the "authorities" had deprived the doctor of the pension of half a pound of wheaten bread per day which the Medical Union had assigned him.

"Yes," says the doctor, "those colleagues of mine assigned

it me even when they themselves had begun to find life none too easy. But at least it may be said for the 'authorities' that I have now given up my practice, and that 'if a man works not, neither shall he eat.' Not but that they would not starve even an Apostle."

Yet, as he speaks, the doctor looks quite calm. The truth is that, for him, life has now passed the rapids. And somehow the dead-whiteness of his features with their round-trimmed beard, and the bright expression of his placid eyes, and the sheen of his waxen, furrowed brow make him vaguely resemble one of our olden-time Russian saints—Saint Sergei, say, or St. Seraphim Sarovski, or a being of the sort that might at any time have been encountered at the gates of a monastery, and relieved with a little dried salmon.

In fact, so strange a character is the doctor that all folk know him as "The Eccentric." Not long ago he mortgaged his villa and almond orchard. Then he divided the resultant sum into two portions. With the one portion he knocked up a new ramshackle abode for himself, and with the other sum he purchased thread, boots, shirts and the like. His explanation was that—

"Money will soon have become utterly valueless."

But since then his all has been taken away—his stockings, his shirts, his every stitch—as "superfluities."

Also he has buried this year, firstly his old serving-woman, secondly his imbecile son, thirdly his wife. And now he says:

"Is it not curious that even Natalia Semenovna, strict though she was in her vegetarianism, could fall ill? But towards the end I thought to myself, 'By this time nothing can matter much, for my dietetic experiments are over,' and, going out, I bought a little piece of mutton for her, and made her some cutlets. And *oh*, how she enjoyed them! . . . Well, where she is now she must be better off than if she had still been alive. In these days it must be better to be *in* the ground than *on* it."

As for the doctor himself, his hands are tremulous, his jaws twitching, his lips whitish, his gums blue, and the pupils

of his eyes contracted: each and all of which are signs that before long he too will be "passing." Everyone has upon him or her that stamp of "passage" now. Yet the fact has ceased to seem surprising.

"I suppose," he goes on with features puckered into a smile, "that you have heard, too, of the fine tomb for Natalia Semenovna which I contrived? Well, doubtless you remember the sideboard which used to stand in our dining-room, the great big sideboard of walnut in which Natalia kept her jars of jam made from our own apricots? Oh, what jam that was! . . . Well, the first thing that those fellows did when they arrived was to seize the last four remaining jars—probably because they themselves don't grow apricots, yet *like* apricots, and *like* apricot jam, and can't make apricot jam for themselves. And then they—then they—Oh, by the way, I hear that a new system of geometry is coming in, and that Euclid is beginning to be exploded, and everything reckoned according to Einstein. . . . Excuse me. What was I talking of just now? My memory is failing terribly."

And he wipes his perspiring brows with an air of regretful apology.

I replace him upon the track of his thoughts.

"Yes, quite so, quite so," he says. "That sideboard, then. It was a sideboard by which Natalia Semenovna had always set immense store, since it had been part of her dowry, and had come to be known as the 'apricot sideboard.' Remember that in every family there is a special nomenclature for household articles, as it were a special set of private intimacies, a special, as it were, volume of family poetry. So much is this so that articles like the sideboard of which I speak actually come to acquire, even if insensibly, a measure of human soul, and to retain it. For example, one sofa of ours we christened 'Kostia,' merely because a student of the name who was visiting us once made a bed of it. Ah, well! By now 'Kostia' has departed. And so has my portrait of my father, my only keepsake of him. Cried the men, 'Down with the General!' So down he came. Yet he was a peaceful man enough, with most of his time spent upon botany."

But the sideboard, the sideboard?"

"The sideboard? Oh yes. Quite so. Well, we had had that sideboard ever since our marriage, and, so far as I remember, thirty years have passed since I planted a bit of land with almond-trees, and was laughed at for my pains, and got dubbed 'The Almond Doctor.' But in time, when the almond-trees had grown up, and were blossoming, you should have seen their dream of young, pink loveliness! . . . Natalia Semenovna once said to me, I remember, 'How I should like, when I die, to die just at this season of the year, so that I could die surrounded with this fairy-tale of flowers!' . . . Aye, and she has died surrounded with cold and squalor, and in a house desecrated and defiled! . . . Well, that sideboard had a glass front to it, and a lock and key. So I thought to myself, 'How about making *it* into a tomb for her? At all events I have seen worse,' and at once proceeded to remove its glass front, and to replace the front with planks. For, for one thing, you see, a hexagonal coffin of the usual sort was not really needed when here we had a three-sided one which would do just as well. 'Besides,' I reflected, 'such a three-sided coffin will be, in a sort of a way, *symbolical*'—symbolical of the Three in One, you know. So, having shored up the planks, I made all secure. Another reason was that I could not well afford to purchase a grave merely for her by herself. And as for the question of hiring a place in a *common* grave for her—well, I should have had first to secure the place, and then to trundle her to the grave, and then to tip her into it in any sort of a fashion. . . . So, no thank you! And another consideration weighing with me was that Natalia Semenovna had always been a creature pre-eminently clean in her flesh. Hence the bare idea of her being put to lie in the grave beside, say, some unclean meat-eater, or, worse, some scrofulous subject, was——! Whereas, if I were to put her into the sideboard, she would have the sideboard all to herself, and have it for ever, and eventually come to smell of her favourite jam."

And in very truth he had consigned his Natalia Semenovna to the sideboard!

"Also the men wanted to sequester my truss. They kept looking at its straps. But in the end they forgot all about it. Schwabe made it for me from a design of my own. However, they laid hands upon everything else. In fact, they even took away my serving-woman's dresses, and it was only when she said to them, 'I had to work hard to make those dresses,' that they flung her back one of them with a shout of 'Why, then, you might as well have been a slave!' They took my concertina also. I am from Tula, you must know, and had treasured that concertina from the days of my schoolgoing. But as it had silver keys on it, the fellows fairly leapt when they saw it. 'A concertina!' And in a trice a polka was on the way."

In passing, be it said, the doctor is not really wearing trousers, but merely leggings that are a fancy garment made out of a piece of yellow, flower-patterned material.

"Yes—the last-remaining apron of my servant they were," he explains. "And for lining they have a piece of sacking similarly coloured, since some painters once used it for wiping their paint-brushes upon. But this peajacket I bought in London, and it ought to last me out. A little faded, perhaps. Its colour once was blue."

And I had always taken it for black stained with coffee!

"Nor am I inventing when I tell you that the men removed also my thermometers, my three barometers, my hygrometer, my chemical balance and my set of boltheads. And in particular they had need of some chemical reagents. Hence they seized upon some bottles of ordinary infusion of mine which I had standing upon a shelf. But the first proved to be a bottle of spirit only, and the next to be a bottle of ammonia. How they cursed me for a bourgeois."

"Do you know what the time is, doctor?"

"A-a-ah!" The doctor shakes at me a humorous, blackened finger. "Do not forget the latest 'decree,' and that henceforth the piece of 'bourgeois prejudice' known as 'time' is to be *verboten*."

In reality, however, this speech is an excuse of the doctor's for delaying his departure. So full of his troubles is he that

he is feeling driven to depute some of them to myself as "superfluities."

"Personally I do not need a timepiece now," he goes on. "By the way, I used to read Jules Verne when I was a boy."

Squinting and holding up the outstretched fingers of one of his hands towards the sun, he takes a "sight" through the fingers' inter-spaces.

"You too remember Jules Verne, I suppose—Cyrus Smith in *The Secret of the Island*, and all the rest of it? What an age ago that seems now! But how desirable and happy a time! No one, in *those* days, ever wanted to come and grab at one's books! Besides, I have grown quite clever now. Even without a clock, I can at any moment tell the time to within five minutes. And as regards distances, I have taught myself, by drawing imaginary lines from the tops of mountains to where I am standing, to determine those mountains' approximate height. I find myself beaten at that only if the sky happens to be overcast, or the time to be night, in that I have not yet completely acquired the hang of the stars. Not but that life is a little *wearisome* without a timepiece. Natalia and I used to live our whole lives by a time-table. Exactly at a quarter to ten we went to bed. Exactly at half-past four we, at all events *I*, used to get up. And for forty years we lived like that. Three watches, no less, I had in those days. But the watch which I miss most now was an English 'turnip' of the sort most affected by English lords. Should you care to hear the history of that watch, or have I told it you already? It would be worth your writing down, and the more so because in it there lies a valuable, a simply invaluable, warning to humanity."

"Tell it me, then, doctor."

MEMENTO MORI

AFTER composing his face to gravity, the doctor proceeds:

"Even when you have heard the story you may not believe it, but declare that I have made it up. Nay, you may even declare that humanity has nothing to do with it. Yet *I* tell *you* that in that case (as you will see for yourself) you will be wrong. Every human event has lurking in it an element of fatality or talismanism—oh, you can laugh if you like, but I am speaking seriously. And seriously I say that my story ought at once to be broadcast to every leading journal in Europe. Not that I can ever effect that of myself, for within five minutes, so to speak, I shall have become a 'departed servant'—a 'departed servant,' if not of God, then of humanity, or if not of humanity, then—— But wait until you have heard further. I say again that my story ought at once to be given to the whole world, and preferably under the title of 'Memento Mori,' or 'The Tale of Doctor Michael Vasilievitch, Once a Servant of Mankind.' How splendid 'Servant of Mankind' would sound! Not but that 'A Servant of His Fellows' might not sound still better."

The old fellow looks solemn, and even inspired.

"The incidents in my story," presently he resumes, "refer to fifty years ago, since they occurred in the year eighteen hundred and—but no! They refer to just *forty* years ago, which was the year eighteen hundred and eighty-one, and the year during which Natalia and I, then on our honeymoon, toured Europe—making the tour, incidentally, an 'educational' trip as well. First we halted at Paris. But we halted there for a short while only, so eager was I to get on to England, and see there the delectable land of the free, the land of *Habeas Corpus*, the land of the first of democratic parliaments, and the land of Herzen. My eagerness was due to the fact that at that time, being fresh from the university,

✓ I was full to the brim of the revolutionary fever. And in those days to lack the revolutionary fever was to lack a soul, since already the age had received a brilliant send-off in the explosion under the Tsar Liberator, and every prospect was pleasing, and Socialism was knocking at the door, and all Europe was breathlessly looking to see what 'results' would ensue. You have, therefore, the age's prevailing atmosphere. The Russian Intellectual of the day had not many possessions, but at least he took care to possess a passport and the revolutionary fever—the passport, of course, being for the Russian Government, and the revolutionary fever for himself, as a credential by which the whole body of Intelligentsia and Intelligentsia's leaders—I had come near to saying 'billy goats,' less because I wanted to insult those leaders than because there had recurred our proverb about 'finding the herd where the billy goat may be'—might look to cement together, and control, the Intelligentsia's members. As for the leaders in question, they were of all sorts. Some of them had never lived in Russia at all. Others of them would cheerfully have strangled their mothers if thereby "the New Order" could have been achieved and consolidated. But one thing all of us had in common: and that was the duty of 'agitating.' Yes, no matter whether one were a drunkard, or an imbecile, or a snatcher of handkerchiefs, one had but steadily to 'agitate' against 'an intolerable Government.' This alone was sufficient to secure for one an 'advance pass' into 'the Beauteous, the Sublime Commonwealth of the Future.' Nor was that 'pass' altogether a thing to be despised, and accordingly I, like the rest, 'agitated' for all I was worth—or, at all events, if not always at full pressure, at least with sufficient enthusiasm pleasantly to warm my interior portions, and to enable me to make a good shift to shed tears, if not actually to succeed in the attempt. But how greatly I wish now that I had also gone on with my task of preparing to instruct posterity through the medium of 'Notes of an Intellectual on Co-operative Commercial Associations.' True, such terms have lost their meaning, become vanities, now; but, for all that, I—Hullo! At last the poor old jade has fallen!"

Yes, at last Liarva has come to the ground, and is lying outstretched with head vainly pointed towards a patch of shade which she must have been trying to reach when her legs gave way. The peacock, struck with this new aspect of her, shrills forth its desert cry. From his drainpipe under the schoolmistress's ruined villa, Bielka, grasping the situation, emerges.

"A veritable scene in a Greek tragedy!" is the doctor's whimsical comment. "Yes, here we have drama *en plein air*, and for 'heroes' the 'gods' in whose power you and I and that poor old creature are lying, and, for setting, *that*,"—the doctor sweeps an arm towards the mountains—"and for 'Chorus' you and myself. True, we, the 'Chorus,' are also in the play's action; but for all that I propose that we indulge our right of Choric prophecy. And herewith I declare the last 'curtain' of the play to be imminent, and that the scene upon which it will fall will be a scene of universal death. Do you agree?"

"I do. All of us are foredoomed."

"Aye, and fast approaching our destiny, if indeed it has not been reached already. . . . Oh, but hadn't I begun to tell you some story or another? My memory is most faulty! Yes—I was talking to you about the revolutionary fever. Well, as soon as Natalia and I reached the land of *Habeas Corpus* and Herzen and Gambetta and Garibaldi and Gladstone and—By the way, is it not curious that all of those names should begin with G¹? Surely there is something mystical, something symbolical, in that? Aye, every one of them begins with G. . . . Well, in England I too 'G'ed,' and, as a first step, called respectfully upon our great, and made them my bow, and offered them pinches of incense. After which I let off some steam in Hyde Park. In Hyde Park one seems to be infected by the very air, until one feels that it is in Hyde Park *par excellence* that one perceives the cradle—despite its griminess—of freedom, and metaphorically puts on clouded spectacles, and starts to fling mud, with shouts of 'Hail, the

¹ The Russian alphabet has no equivalent for the letter H, and therefore the Russian G is used for the purpose.

Revolution!' with a capital R, and lots of 'Down with the police!' Then—then—oh, then I took Natalia (whom in those days I used mostly to call 'Natalochka' or 'Nata'—though in London, to consort with the English style, I sometimes changed that to 'Nellie'). Where was I? Oh, then I took Natalia to buy a watch. . . . Yes, that was *then*. Now she is lying in that 'apricot' sideboard!¹ And one day she will come forth from that sideboard to attend the Dread Tribunal." The doctor chuckles huskily. "And the Archangel will sound his trumpet, and shout the prescribed formula of 'Arise, ye dead, and be reviewed of the Great Inspector!' and we shall all of us arise—yes, arise exactly as we are—some of us from the bottom of the sea with our feet lead-shackled, and others of us from those ravines with the earth still crammed into our mouths,² and our bones broken, and others of us from the cellars with our skulls blown to bits—and be requested to plead before the Tribunal. So only think of the laughter that will arise when Natalia comes forth from under lock and key—yes, after a great rattling at the lock (oh, it will be as good as a Greek play!), is seen to issue from that sideboard all smelling of apricot jam, and attired in—well, attired in what, do you think? Why, in an old sack and nothing else, for the reason that when those men raided our place they made off with all Natalia's blouses and skirts as so many 'superfluities'! . . . But perhaps we ought to remember that those men have womenfolk as much as we have. Particularly I remember Natalia's dress of green silk. Well, only the other day I came face to face with that dress again—this time on the person of Nastushka Barantchik, of the bazaar's 'Tartar Cave!' . . . Yes, the Last Great Judgment will be a splendid entertainment indeed! It will equal any theatrical benefit, and make the very Archangels gape—possibly even the Lord God of Sabaoth Himself."

Suddenly, sitting up straight, he claps his hands and shouts: "Sh-sh-sh! Get away from her, vile, villainous cur!"

¹ The author does not state the fact, but it is to be presumed that the doctor had since buried both his wife and the sideboard.

² A reference to the fact that the Bolsheviks buried many of their victims alive.

For all this time Bielka has been approaching the dead mare. Now, on hearing the doctor's shout, the cur leaps over Liarva's carcass, and regains his original lurking-place, whilst the peacock, spreading its tail, takes up a position near the mare's head and begins to strut to and fro.

"The attendant fowl!" the doctor comments. "It is the Final Apotheosis. It is the real thing in Greek tragedy."

Then, wiping his forehead, and wrinkling his brows, he continues:

"What tricks my memory plays me! Why, to-day I even forgot the words of the Lord's Prayer! Yes, I tried three times to remember them, and could not, and at last had to consult a prayer-book! Whence an interesting generalisation might be deduced. However, putting that aside for the moment, let me— Of what, though, was I telling you just now?"

"Of how you took Natalia Semenovna to buy a watch."

"Quite so, quite so. Yes, to buy a watch. Well, to buy it we went to a mean, dark, dirty alley-way near the river, near the Thames—a place where all the houses were old and sooty, and every window had been cracked. And what weather it was! It was weather that might have been made for suicide, so horrible was the trickling drizzle, and so foul the yellow fog. In fact, though the time was daytime, the gas-lamps looked like specks, and the air was clammy with a special sort of sea-fishiness of texture. Never, never shall I forget the whole odious scene! And the reason why we had come to seek such a horrible place was that a compatriot of ours had particularly recommended it to us—and coughed and spat blood as he had done so. Truly it was a place of the kind to be found described in the works of Dickens. In it were nought but the dark-looking shops of antique dealers, of fellows like human spiders who lurked in their dusty, cobwebby dens as the grey, stealthy-footed, hairy *arachnæ* of London's underworld, creatures speaking only in undertones as they moved about amongst their lumber. Yet what things those creatures had in their shops! Everything there was of the past, and ranged from broken sextants to cutlasses that had been the property of buccaneers and filibusters, from 'gods' of Malaya

and Papua and the remote African jungle to fetishes of human bone used by savage chieftains and human scalps and magic amulets. Thus the region was a great human dustbin, a great blood-flecked human ragbag whence those human spiders stood ready to pick out and polish up anything that one fancied."

"Doctor, you are wandering again. The watch, *the watch!*"

The doctor looks at me coldly—then retorts with a nod:

"The watch *is* what I am telling you about, after first trying to draw for you a little picture that should give you the watch's right setting. . . . Yes, truly I drew that watch from a ragbag! But do you know what such human ragbags, such human dustbins, *really* subsist upon? They subsist upon the rapine, and the treachery, and the blood, and the tears of humanity—upon, in sum, that element in human nature which goes to form the human instincts of acquisitiveness and destructiveness. Emporia of the lowest possible kind such establishments are. They are the basket into which the cook casts the bloodstained poultry feathers which later are to serve her for a pillow-stuffing. They are dens wherein gold and silver and precious stones lie cheek by jowl with the brimming-eyed desolation of human souls. For remember that at the basis of every upheaval in *la haute politique* lies—yes, despite all that is said and blubbered about 'brotherly disinterestedness'—a subsoil of inducements to humanity to desire and to strive for certain 'amenities,' and that behind every such upheaval there are left many basketfuls of blood-stained feathers. And it is for the disposal of those blood-stained feathers that antique shops are opened all over the world."

Hist! What is that crackling, that throbbing, seaward? Beyond doubt it must be either a motor-boat or a destroyer. Yes, and it is coming nearer and nearer . . . A destroyer it is, and as it shoots landward like a great black blot, I can see two belts of curly foam trailing in its wake. The doctor claps his hands to his ears

"Listen!" he whispers. "It has come for *them*."

'For *them*? For whom?'

"For the seven just surrendered from the mountains 'under an amnesty.' Hadn't you heard? Those men are being kept

'pending an amnesty.' Oh, the crackling that that infernal thing makes! It annoys me unbearably."

As the destroyer luffs in towards the pier something tells me that the seven obstinate "Greens," the seven just surrendered from the mountains and now lying in that cellar, they too are listening to the vessel's arrival—and *are aware of the purpose of her coming.*

"Well, doctor, it has ceased to crackle now."

"Has it? Then by to-morrow, perhaps even by to-night, all will be over, and *they* will have been tipped overboard, and a few more watches, boots and garments restored to life's trafficking. 'Taken out to sea, and——'! Do you know, someone has just pointed out to me a young woman whose husband, or betrothed, or something, is one of them. She, for some reason, has hopes!"

"Hopes of what? Of their being spared?"

"Exactly so. And such things do happen sometimes. However, let us wait until to-morrow."

"And meanwhile you were telling me about a watch?"

"I was. I have said that a compatriot of mine, an *émigré*, had advised us to seek that spot beside the Thames because it was the very spot for our purpose; it was the rendezvous for any sailor bringing home a rarity. And I was especially anxious to get hold of some '*curio*' watch, of some watch which a mariner had brought home from Kutch or the Straits of Magellan, since my early readings of Captain Marryat and Jules Verne had bred in me a distinct taste for the exotic. For choice I wanted a watch which some old sea-dog had obtained in barter from a cannibal king, and surrendered to a Spanish grandee before being wrecked on the Spanish Main. That was because I, like everyone else, had lurking in me a weakness for things connected with human tragedies. In no other way can one explain the fact that people treasure Chinese swords which have lopped off thousands of human heads, and pay thousands of pounds in order to possess them. Besides, the man who has things of the sort hanging on his study walls can always tell his guests, and especially those of the fairer sex, that 'with this very

weapon——' etc., and thus obtain an 'effect,' and cut something of a figure. Strange, too, is the distance which some of these curios will travel. Russian curios are particularly ubiquitous, passing from one international pocket to another. . . . Well, Natalia and I entered one of those shops, the shop which for a fee of two shillings our friend the *émigré* had recommended as an emporium peculiarly suited to our purpose. And as, when recommending it, he had whispered meaningly, 'It is a shop kept by a revolutionary Irishman, but don't let him see that you know that,' I had added another shilling in recognition of the poor cripple's civility. So, as I say, we entered. And never could you conceive what the shop's interior was like, nor yet what its smell was like. That smell was a smell distinctive, a smell apart from all others, a smell which, if made up of one thing more than another, consisted predominantly of stale shrimps, rotten cod and human blood turned putrid. It was worse than the smell of a dissecting theatre. And even now I can see the smell's and the den's proprietor. A sort of squat baboon or gorilla he was—a man with greenish eyes, a red jowl, great hairy, clotted, blue-wenned wrists, a splayed-out mouth, a stringy neck, a bluish-pink, cartilaginous nose, and a scalp surrounded with a ring of tangled, reddish-yellow bristles. Naturally, I reflected, 'If this is a fair type of the Irish revolutionary we shall soon get things moving, for he is manifestly a Home Ruler!' On the counter before the fellow there were a bottle of whisky and the half of a salted haddock—a small half, a half so split off as to show one of the fish's eyes alone; and from this haddock he kept cutting lumps, spitting them upon the point of a two-edged knife which had for a handle an animal's hoof and hairy shank (probably the late property—the knife, I mean—of a Hottentot), peppering them, and swallowing them so persistently that, on his first addressing me, I got the full benefit of the resultant 'klop-klopping.' He said, 'Ah! I perceive you to be a Russian. Good day. Are you an *émigré*, a revolutionary? Then hurrah for the Russian Republic!' And with that, and with a grin, he bolted some more salt fish. So of course we entered into a

talk about our respective systems of government, and spoke, in particular, of the Tsar Liberator's recent assassination. Evidently the deed had brought the gorilla great satisfaction, for as soon as I mentioned it he turned up his red-and-whiskyrish-and-cayenne-pepperish eyes, and exclaimed: 'I congratulate you upon the achievement! Should things in Russia continue thus, you will soon have your country rid of *everything*. May your great and noble people attain further progress yet! It—is—well.' And, as firmly as I could bring myself to do it, I pressed his claw of a hand. Nay, like a true Russian dolt I even contrived to squeeze out a few tears, so fierce within me was my 'pride in my countrymen.' After which I went on, 'Yes, and we Russians are forming a squad for the slaying not only of our own rulers, but of rulers in general. Those whom we pick for the job we call 'Terrorists,' as men who are strangers equally to pity and to fear. Only right is it that, after removing our own rubbish with dynamite, we should similarly blow up that of the rest of the world.' And this fairly transported the baboon: he thrust forward his tusks, spat, grinned, and cried, 'Ah! So *that* is what Russia is going to export, eh? Splendid stuff it is, too!' And again we clasped hands, for we were forming an alliance, a bond, between one man of culture and another. Then he gave me a dram of his whisky and a slice of his smoked fish. And that slice of fish he held out to me on a dragon-patterned plate. And as he did so he explained the reason for the pattern being there—said that a Chinese executioner had been accustomed to use the plate when proffering his mandarin superior the daily tale of hearts of executed criminals! Oh, pray don't take me as saying that the Irishman may *not* have been lying, but only that his and my initiatory antiquarian-sacramental banquet was of the kind which I have described. And what next? Oh, then—oh, then I found myself falling in love with a great 'turnip' watch in a green and gold case. And said the Irishman about it, 'This is no ordinary watch. Once it belonged to the great Mr. Gladstone, and was given by him to his valet, and was sold by the valet to myself. Hence the price of it is twenty-

five pounds.' Well, sure enough, I found engraved on the case's interior the word 'Gladstone' and a crest of a castle on a hill; and though you may say that the engraving had been done by the knavish Irishman himself (for, as an Irishman, he was bound to be capable of tricks), and though I too had at first felt prejudiced against him for his greenish eyes and gristly nose, his words had since evoked my sympathy, and—well, he was an Irishman and an exile. Oh, to be frank I do not think, I *know* him to have been a knave. But then—the revolutionary fever, you know. So he went on, 'If you care to buy the watch I will guarantee that it shall last you for fifty years,' and at last became so eager for me to take it that he offered to allow me an abatement of three whole pounds. And in this connection mark well his words. He said: '*As* you are a Russian, and *as* you will therefore know how to use a watch properly, you shall have it for twenty-two pounds instead of twenty-five. Every penny even of that will come back to you owing to the watch's merits. Come! And another pound yet shall be taken off. Also, mark my words, and see if one day they do not come true. *The watch will in any case be yours until the Great Revolution has come about in Russia.*' And to that I responded, 'God grant that things so befall!' and the Irishman repeated, 'Until then, I tell you.' And the watch *has* been mine until then! Curiously enough, the man who relieved me of it (and, with it, of myself) the other day was just such another red-haired and gristly-nosed fellow as that Irishman. 'Comrade' Kreps he was—an ex-student (or, at all events, registered as such) and amateur verse-writer. He told me this himself as I stood trying to get him at least to leave me my meteorological instruments, trying to convince him that, as I was a doctor, I was, like himself, a Russian Intellectual. Well, where *now* do you suppose my watch is? You would never guess."

"In a Museum of the History of the Russian Revolution?"

"Worse—in the waistcoat pocket of 'Comrade' Kreps, 'ex-student.' As true that is as that you and I once upon a time were Russian Intellectuals, and that everything used to be something which it is not now. I saw our good Kreps

in Yalta only yesterday—and the watch was on him, and he was showing its ‘Gladstone’ to his friends. He is the fellow, too, who not long ago had his zeal rewarded with an order for twenty *vedros* of wine from the ‘Proletarian Cellars,’ but was thwarted by the fact that no transport was available for the wine’s removal. That is as true as the foregoing. In Yalta there are Tartars who could confirm my words. Yes, the order for the wine was made in recognition of Mr. Kreps’s zeal, of Mr. Kreps’s ‘Gladstone-ing.’ That is to say, nowadays a youth cannot do without a watch, some wine, and plenty of female society! And to think of what the great Gladstone would have felt if he had known that one day his watch——! At the same time, there would seem to be something *mystical* in the affair. Thus I understand that this Kreps has a father, or a brother, or an uncle, or something of the sort, whose name is *not* Gladstone, but, nevertheless, has an optical shop over there”—again the doctor points towards the mountains—“and in that shop a stock of watches. In fact, I have a clear remembrance of one Kreps dealing as a tradesman in that region, and selling watches stamped with his own funereal name¹—or is it an Irish name? Or am I thinking of ‘Krabs,’ which is more reminiscent of submarine depths? ² Anyhow, the point is: may it not one day happen that my watch will turn up at that tradesman’s shop beyond the mountains (quite probably it may do so. Why should it not?), and a gentleman, say a Doctor McStone, may come from Great Britain to see ‘The Land of the Free,’ and chance to enter red-headed, gristly-snouted ‘Citizen Kreps’s’ shop, and have sold to him, ‘at a reduction,’ my watch, and go back with it, the good and simple-minded gentleman, to his ‘effete, slave-driving country,’ and go on telling the time by it until the ‘Great Revolution’ has occurred in England as well, and—in short, may it not happen that, in consequence of the English revolution, some English ‘Kreps’ or another brings my watch to Russia again, and the watch then returns to England, and retravels to Russia, and so on, and so on, in an endless cycle of trade dealings?”

¹ Russian for *crêpe*.

² Russian for *crab*.

Certainly the doctor is queer. That seems more than ever certain now. Decay, too, seems to be oozing from him as he sits gazing down at the ravine's stick- and stone-strewn bed. And I sit hoping that he is not going to stay much longer, so weary am I of listening to his discourse! Nevertheless he makes no movement to depart.

Next there appear the turkey-hen and her chicks.

"Aha!" He picks up the docile bird. "A good subject for an ornithological cabinet! Why, she weighs two pounds at least! Yet eating her would scarcely be worth while now, so soon all of us will be in the same boat—you, I, she, and those chicks!"

With that he unfastens his little bag, and gives the birds a handful of peas, and then, with myself, he watches the birds (ourselves as hungry as they) tie themselves into knots to reach the food, with the foster-mother solicitously superintending. Occasionally a pea rolls in her own direction as well: but whenever that happens she extends to it such an irresolute head (lest one of the chicks should like to have the first peck) that again and again she loses her opportunity.

"Ah!" the doctor shouts to the wilderness at large. "Come and learn of *these!*"—then he adds:

"The reason why I have outstayed my welcome is that somehow I feel bound to keep my hand in in the matter of paying calls. You see, after each of my calls I add up its items of information; and the result has been greatly to open my eyes. As for the fatigue of it, I spread out the process. And to what, should you think, has the sum of my observations brought me?"

"I do not know, doctor—though, as a matter of fact, such things have ceased to matter."

"Yes, they have ceased to matter, for very soon now '*nos habebit humus.*' Yet I still pay calls for the sake of self-consolation, of self-satisfaction, of self-forgetfulness."

"Ah! And the result of your observations?"

"You shall know it. Would that I had the strength to write it down! As it is, I can only retail it verbally."

And he continued as follows.

THE ALMOND ORCHARD

"THE first thing that I did when I came to this part of the country was to acquire that plot where the almond orchard used to stand. I bought the plot in days when you could hardly keep a footing on it if the wind was blowing off Chatyr Dagħ: but forty years, and the events of forty years, have passed since then. For a long time people used to laugh at me for having planted an orchard in such a spot: but in time that, too, ceased, and mostly for the reason, I regret to state, that the majority of the laughers passed out of existence. Everywhere, and in every way, the Intelligentsia of Russia have become a back number. And before a new Intelligentsia can arise new Intellectuals must arise. And possibly that will never come about. . . . So for years I lived amongst my clean, fresh almond-trees, and whilst recognising my many faults, recognising that my character and disposition contained much that was singular, I loved the orchard, and delighted in its spring blossomings. And now in my discourse I must substitute for the words 'almond orchard' the words 'reckonings based upon life's lessons and deductions.' For example, once upon a time I went to bed at a set, regular hour: and now by force of habit, though I have no clock to help me, I can tell instinctively when a quarter to ten has arrived. . . . Yet I have begun to be troubled with insomnia, and to find myself thrown upon my reflections as a resource. Also my memory is failing. I told you just now how I forgot the words of the Lord's Prayer this morning. And, as a matter of fact, it will not be long before *everyone* has forgotten them, now that a cesspool has burst and overwhelmed us, and is forcing us to believe that when we leave it by the road of death we shall be leaving it for nothing at all. Not but that the thought that my ego can no longer find logical belief in a world beyond this foul inundation worries me extremely. Often I

say to myself, 'Can the Beyond be as bankrupt as the Here?' and often I reply to myself, 'Yes, certainly it can, for such a grotesque cataclysm as this, such a mockery of and trampling upon, and shouting down of the glorious Resurrection from animal dust to Eternal Life, to the Everlasting State whither, as though towards a snow-white mountain range, man's better and more spiritual portion has ever tended, must represent more than the overthrow of our human condition—it must represent also that condition's extinction *in toto*.' But you may say: 'Are there no absolute truths left?' and I should reply to that, 'No—absolutely none, for humanity is being crucified all over Europe, all over the world, and buried with a stake through its heart, and allowed to call for no reckoning.' . . . And that last point is the worst of all, the point that never will anyone be called upon to account for all that has happened, since, according to what we are told, the Great Judge no longer exists, even if He *ever* existed. Yes, we find cultured human beings proclaiming that as a fact equally with the uncultured, and coming to regard life as no more than a Raisuli-Harman affair. This is because all mysteries have had the curtain rent from them. For long ages, we are told, did this world's so-called guides and teachers strive to blind their flocks to the fact that the curtain had holes in it, for fear lest those flocks should stray from the path: but now the hooligan has arrived to tear down the curtain *en bloc*, and there keep it until the completion of man's metamorphosis from human to brute. 'For,' says the hooligan, 'we are not going to be put off with your school talk any more.' Hence some of us folk's forgetfulness of the Lord's Prayer. Nor shall we ever again have a chance of re-learning the prayer, for, splendid old poem though it is, it stands struck from the list as 'effete' and 'played out.' 'Away with it!' is the cry, much as men cried 'Away with that almond orchard!' before they abolished it, cut it down to the last chip. On the other hand, *you* still have green things about you. Only at my place has everything been removed. Why, those eight *puds* of timber would have lasted me the winter through!"

"Then you still have some desire to live?"

"I have: but only in order to continue my experiments. For example, I am making some notes on hunger, and studying upon my own person starvation's paralysing effect upon volition. For I find starvation slowly to atrophise the will. Also I have discovered that, if only one could inoculate the whole world with hunger, one could conquer the whole world. Yes, verily the day may come when those folk over there" (again he points towards the mountains) "may invite me to deliver a course of lectures upon inanition's physical effects. 'A Lecture by a Talented Professor who Himself is Suffering from Hunger!' Why, the hall would be crammed, and none the less so because the audience themselves might be famishing, and therefore as interested in the subject as the lecturer. Yes, I might be able, through such a lecture, to evoke new hypotheses, and, by combining the subjective with the objective, to evolve a sort of scientific Sadism, and, in short, to formulate a scientific course never before provided by the medical faculty. Think of it! Think of the spectacle of a professor, the product of a cellar, lecturing to other products of cellars upon his and their physiological aspect! How immeasurably science would be enriched! 'The Physiology of Immured Persons: a Chemico-Laboratorial Investigation Based upon Study of from One to Two Million Applications of Mental and Physical Torture to Subjects of Both Sexes, of All Ages, and of Every Degree of Intellectual Development!'. Why, students would attend the course from every quarter of the universe, and sit thunderstruck with the experiment's unique grandiosity! And for fresh laboratorial material we could always go to the mountains, where always there is plenty. Has ever Europe, I would ask you again, witnessed an experiment of the sort? True, it did witness something like it when the Holy Inquisition was in being, ~~but in that case there was no propounding of scientific theses as would obtain in my own experiment.~~ And additional excitement would be imparted by the fact that never should we know how the experiment would end. We should know, feel, merely that daily we were growing weaker as daily we

reduced our ration of an ounce of straw-bread to a ration of nothing at all beyond the modicum of warm water which I, as the presiding professor, might now and then order for a better prosecution of the experiment through resuscitation of the nerves. That is to say, none of us would ever know on what night precisely each of us would become a corpse, mouldering, mouldering—well, mouldering where? Oh, in the ground, in a ravine, in the sea—anywhere. Nor from first to last should we see the overseers, the judges, of the experiment, since that would not be necessary. No; having been haled to our cellars, we—oh, and do you know, I have just been making a calculation that, taking the past three months alone, the Crimea's output of humanity shot without trial has been between 8000 and 9000 railway wagonloads—say 300 trainloads, or 140,000 tons. And all of it good prime, fresh human meat! The blood, too (just wait a moment whilst I get out my notebook)—the blood, too, I have reckoned up in *vedros*: with the result that I see that anyone establishing a Crimean albumen factory might soon build up a very pretty European trade."

"Then you can amuse yourself still?"

"I can. And my means of so doing is thought. So much material have I at hand for the purpose that I am *always* thinking. For example, we have a contribution to the history of Socialism lying right before our eyes. And the most curious fact about Socialism is that, to date, its theorists, its word-spinners, have added to life's building not a single tintack, and wiped from humanity's face not a single tear, though always it is on their lips that they are working for the general happiness. Pah! It is blood that they are working for, and as yet the business is only just beginning, as yet we have only had our first taste of life's meaning under an earthly god. Of course, they would reassure us by saying: 'We have our mandate from the ape. Let every louse bite boldly, nor look back. The Great Resurrection is at hand'; but what a distortion, what a gross distortion of facts this is! It is tantamount to saying that through bloodshed and a cesspool we are to rise to apehood, and then, become apes, to ascend

farther towards some indefinite height or condition of mental godhood which shall permeate the whole Universe with Wonderworking Reason and its Gospel whilst all the time we are fast retobogganing down to the level of the blood-feeding and all-acquisitive louse! So whence this new gospel of *carte blanche* and its commentaries? By whom are we having that gospel offered to us? Well, doubtless you remember Chekov's telegraphist, Yat, and Yat's discourses on electricity? These 'Yats,' too, have acquired their gospel through an 'aching to display their cleverness.' And acquired it from whom? From just other such 'Yats' as themselves. And now we see that 'cleverness' displayed and laid before us. Every louse is to have his full portion, and the world is to be made free for all, and no one is to have individual responsibility, and nothing is to be accounted repellent. What? Are there tens of thousands of people starving on the Volga, reduced to eating corpses? Oh, one can hardly call *that* repellent. And sure enough, a louse, when fastened upon a neck, and allowed to suck its fill, finds no occasion for disgust whilst doing so. And meanwhile all the nations of the world are looking on at the Great Socialist Experiment like students at a surgical demonstration—watching to see what 'impressive phenomena' will issue from the victim. How could anyone possibly interfere with such an interesting experiment, the experiment of inoculating one hundred and fifty million human beings with Socialism? And of the human beings thus being churned in the machine you and I are two. Well, we shall never get a chance to spurt out of the machine. How well I remember Doctor Siechenov's stereotyped cry of 'Loubka, bring me a fresh frog!' Before us we see two million frogs being vivisected; with their breasts cut open, and their backs branded with red stars, and their necks beaten with the butt-ends of revolvers over latrines, and their brains splashed against cellar walls. And for what? For ~~the sake of the~~ Great Experiment! Meanwhile, as it waits for 'results,' the audience traffics with the experimenters. 'What do such things matter?' Dostoevski once said that, to make a really great social experiment, it would be necessary

duke

showing

to borrow a million souls from the human storehouse; but in this estimate he must have erred, seeing that it has proved necessary to borrow not one million, but two. And that is as regards only the Russian repository, and without taking account of the rest of the world's repositories. Well, the experiment has been proceeding for some little while now, and its results, so far, are the louse in the saddle, and that desert over there—a desert gaping to heaven with its blood-blinded eyes!”

The doctor waves a hand towards—towards what? Towards a ruined villa, a wilderness, the carcass of an old mare, and a few vinegar-shrubs!

Bielka, still couched in his old lurking-place, is sniffing the air, awaiting his opportunity. Presently Uncle Andrei crosses the middle distance, dressed in a canvas suit fashioned from the coverings of some furniture which he has been breaking up at “Tikhaia Pristan.” Is he unemployed? He is looking out for a job.

“Everything,” the doctor continues in prophetic vein, ‘that is not dead already will be dead soon. Uncle Andrei also is approaching his end, and so is my neighbour Grigori Odaruk, and so is Lame Andrei of the Mashkovo vineyard. All are on their last legs, but do not know it. And the first of the lot to be finished off will be myself, for I am thought still to be rich! So by the time that winter comes you will have seen ‘results’ in plenty, and ourselves swept into them. Only yesterday a quiet, industrious man of my acquaintance died of sheer starvation. He was a house-painter, and had more than once done work at my place. And the other day poor mad Prokofii the shoemaker was done to death on the beach by some Red soldiers for walking along and, in his dementia, singing ‘God save the Tsar!’ Yes, it was found necessary to put an end even to a sick, sorry, hungry brother like that, for the ‘Great Experiment’ had to be thought of. For that matter, I myself am experimenting to see how long life can be supported solely upon dried peas.”

And after fumbling in a pocket of his “London” jacket

he throws a pea to the Glutton in return for her attentive regard of him.

"Solely upon dried peas—yes. Ten pounds of them I've got—hidden away in a dog kennel, lest they be sequestered as 'superfluities.' And I allow myself a handful of them a day—shoot the peas into my mouth, and then, inasmuch as my teeth are bad (the men made off with my false ones—grabbed them out of a tumbler as soon as they saw that they were gold-mounted), roll them about with my tongue until they are softened, and swallow. I began the experiment twelve days ago. And upon the top of the peas I take a few roasted bitter almonds. The roasting is the important point, for roasting volatilises almonds and makes them act as a slow poison. I make my daily dose thirty shreds, and believe that I can pass beyond this cesspool to annihilation more painlessly by that method than by any other. So one day my pulse will quicken, my heart start racing, and——"

The doctor breaks off, and for a moment sits showing me how one day he will sit with eyes dilated and mouth agape. Then he resumes:

"Yes, we are dissolving before our very eyes, and never noticing it. Then *let* us dissolve, and as soon as possible, now that everything has become the abomination of desolation. Or, as an alternative, let us go out of our minds. Not but that the latter resource entails the danger of our losing our chances of going out of the world as well, through the risk of our being rendered too mindless to be capable of committing suicide when the time comes, and finding ourselves condemned to remain as mentally entombed as was poor mad Prokofii."

However, not greatly affected by these considerations, I fall rather to fancying what Prokofii's actual sensations of death under heavy fists must have been like. Yet how come the doctor's words to impress me so little?

"What is the best thing to do with my poultry?" I say.

"What is the best thing to do with your poultry? What is the best——? Why, to kill and eat them, of course—have one good meal and go. And a turkey-hen, too! How comes

no one yet to have eaten *her*? Why, she is a living absurdity! Yes, have that good meal, and go. There is nothing else to be done. Oh—yesterday I made another experiment—collected all my photographs and letters together and burnt them. And the result? That I can feel as though they had never existed. It was an idea, an invention, of a single moment. . . . For I believe the supreme disclosure to be at hand, and that when it arrives we may find that *nothing* has ever really existed—that even I myself may turn out to have been the mere chance projection of a chance thought. And if that should prove to be the case, then of course all these horrors and abominations and slaughter-houses also will have been but imagination and dreams. And inasmuch as dream-existence of the material is impossible, all life will prove never to have existed.”

As the doctor sits looking at me he gives me the impression of having already adopted his own suggestion, of having already gone out of his mind. But presently he smiles at his thoughts, and resumes:

“Hence we can now create for ourselves both a new philosophy and a new religion—the philosophy, of course, a philosophy of the Non-Reality of the Real, and the religion a religion of Non-Existence of Cesspools. As regards the latter in particular, its aim will be to help us to disregard the present nightmare and even believe that the past has been a dream. But the idea does not easily lend itself to words. . . . Oh—you were asking me about your poultry. I too used to have a hen, a hen *tout seul*, as a pet for Natalia Semenova. And at first, when she departed, I thought of shutting up the creature in the sideboard along with her as, so to speak, a sacrifice to her memory; but eventually I relinquished the idea and gave the hen some more peas. And whenever the bird came and visited me on the verandah (though in her latter days she did not go in much for walking about, but preferred to sit squatting in corners with her feathers all ruffled up), I would say to her, ‘Come, Golochka! How is the Great Experiment affecting *you*?’ And, cocking her head at me, she would forbear to reply, and I would give her another pea or

two. What must she do, though, when shut into a room one night, but go and commit suicide!"

"You don't mean to say that she——?"

"Yes, I do, though. I assert that deliberately she went and poisoned herself by eating a bitter almond taken from a plateful which I had set aside after roasting. At all events, I know that getting up that morning earlier than myself, she found the almonds, and had reached the stage of convulsions by the time that I found her. Have *you* got any almonds placed handy? They are best taken in powdered form. At any time you could settle your business for yourself with a hundred shreds—at all events as far as this present séance is concerned. Upon that I give you my word. . . . And now I must go and visit our poor old friend on the hill, the lady who once sojourned in Paris and caught a glimpse of life's splendour. By the way, have you heard of the Tartar in Baktchi-Sarai who recently pickled and ate his dead wife? After all, considering how things stand, there is not so very much to be wondered at in that. It is merely that Baba-Yaga is afoot once more."

"Baba-Yaga? Now I had just been thinking of her!"

"Aha! Then you see for yourself! True, Baba-Yaga is only a folk-tale; but sometimes folk-tales actually materialise, and now that life is over nothing need surprise us. Yes, you and I are the last surviving atoms of the world's erstwhile stock of sober, prosaic thought. The rest is with the past. And even we are 'superfluities.' And *they*"—the doctor points towards the mountains again—"are only so much seeming."

To think that such a dialogue between two human beings could ever have been held!

When the doctor departs to visit our neighbour, he is bearing under his arm his little bag of peas and carrying over his head his "white" patched umbrella, and tottering a little in his gait. To meet him comes the voice of Lialia with:

"Oh, here comes Michael Vasilievitch! Here comes Michael Vasilievitch!"

And with Vovoda she goes skipping before him and peeping

at his little bag, since possibly that bag may contain wheat or even Indian corn. Never do the children guess that in reality the bag contains childhood's and pigeonhood's prime delicacy in the shape of dried peas.

And I? I remain sitting on the edge of the vineyard ravine and ruminating over the Baba-Yaga folk-tale. The peacock spreads its gorgeous, rainbow-hued fan-firescreen of a tail, and falls to strutting beside its villa, whilst Bielka, crouching open-mouthed beside the dead mare's head, stretches out his muzzle as though desirous of kissing her. And then I hear a growling and a slobbering and a crackling as the hound buries his fangs in the mare's lips and tongue, and pulls them out. And only an hour ago the mare was roaming that wilderness there! Next the Glutton makes her appearance—approaches and eyes me intently. Is she thinking of peas? I take hold of her to inspect her feet. "Why flutter so? Think you that I am going to make a meal of you from the feet upwards now that the doctor declares all things to have become possible? Nay, nay, my Glutton!" . . . Quietly, trustfully she goes to sleep.

Still, with eyelids growing heavy, I remain sitting on that terrace gazing at the mountains, but without things really coming through to my vision. Half asleep, half awake, I have in my ears a faint rattling and humming and murmuring, and in my temples a booming like a waterfall. By now the sun is setting. . . . Shall I throw myself down the cliff? There would be nothing strange now in doing such a deed, or in fact any other, for all the world has come to be a Baba-Yaga folk-tale, and I can hear Baba-Yaga herself scouring the mountains.

THE WOLF'S LAIR

MUST I once more go and scour the ravine for firewood?

The frame of the ravine is a cup of blue, and from amongst the ravine's boulders and shrubs the heavens too look bluer than from anywhere else. The sun's hot haze steams, quivers, languishes. Sleeping under it in the ravine, sleeping their last sleep, are some oak-stumps thousands of years old. As I arouse them with my billet-hook their somnolent tissues fly apart with a grating and a cracking. Well, in the winter-time those tissues will become rather things of flame and glow. In the sun's glare a little yellow-bellied lizard is dozing. It hears my footsteps and raises a drowsy eye, but speedily re-coils itself, so well does it know and is used to me. I reassure it with a low whistle, and once more—though with gold-rimmed eyes ever on guard—it basks in the sunlight. A certain resemblance exists between us. Both of us are lovers of the sun, both of us are possessionless, and both of us are solitary. Now the little jewel-casket like creature blinks and gazes at me, and then seems to swoon! Surely that swoon is not born of fear? Surely it comes but of wonderment at God's world? Once more the creature stiffens itself in a streak and protudes eyes resembling little black beads, or morsels of caviare. Everywhere cicadas are shaking out their dry, never-ending chirrup-song, the ravine's warm heartbeat. And such is that song that on its ceasing the stillness engulfs one and makes one's head swim. . . .

But I cannot climb to the top of the ravine. The heat of the morning has sapped my strength. . . .

Look at that stump there, and the notches upon it. What recollections it brings back to me!

In mid-spring it was, at the time when our verandah's clustered glycerine-plants were breaking into flower. On the topmost bough of that old almond-tree a blackbird was softly

whistling its vernal lay to our little new home, and about everything there was an air of invitation—there was so about the pink clusters of brier-rose on the garden fence, about the villa's white walls and green lattice-shutters, about the peacock preening itself under the cedar-tree, about the blue trail of smoke over the kitchen chimney, and about the darkening mountains' purple haze. Those mountains might have been saying to our souls: "Henceforth we shall ever be together," and meaning by the words that henceforth they would ever watch over our peaceful lives and send us or veil from us our sun, and give us souging rains, and, gold or purple, in light or in shade, guard to the end our radiant existence.

Yes, and on that evening of wistful hopes I was calmly pacing my garden. To see my trees! First there was my old almond with a base much gnawed about, but still bearing itself bravely and fast covering itself over again with leaves. And then there was my peach-tree, a little harried by the winds, but able always to be tied up again. And lastly there was the oak. "O oaken friend, one day, if you keep on growing, you may see sitting on a bench beneath your shade (for I am going to fit up such a bench) two aged folk with dim eyes regarding their changed garden and that never-changing star above Babugan's crest!"

And it was on that evening that first I encountered *you*, my oldest of oaken stumps, my labour's sharer, as you lay sprawling under the cypresses amid the restful half-light and hush. I remember that as I eyed you hospitably I said, my heart charged with happiness, "You shall join me in my pleasures and toil with me in my tasks." Also did you hear our domestic discussion about the site of your future resting-place? Did you hear me eventually decide that you should remain where you were, since in years to come it would be pleasant to sit upon you and smoke an evening cigarette as I gazed upon the sea, or dreamed over the distances? For we believed in those days that we should never see the thread of our daily life broken, but that that thread would spin itself onward and onward, with *you* always to watch over our existence.

Well, of all that nothing now will ever come true: Hollowed

out, jagged with slashings, notched with the axe you lie. Nor is it billets alone that I have carved from you and burnt. With those billets I have cast into the fire stillborn hopes. . . .

Again and again the notches catch my eye. . . . Some ants are crawling over them. . . . Surely that is a knocking at the outer gate? Yes, a knocking it is. Also I can hear Tartar riding-horses neighing and their grooms stamping about impatiently. For to-day we are going for a picnic in the mountains. Listen to the cicalas beating out their song! See the sunshine blazing upon the garden's ripe, pendent pears, upon the garden's heaped peach- and cherry-trees! But are those trees really *my* trees, that verandah *my* verandah, that roof of coloured glass *my* roof, those columns *my* columns? Oh, but I must hurry, for to-day we are to go for a mountain picnic! . . . Where has everyone gone? The horses are waiting. Their grooms are knocking at the gates. Hither and thither I run, I run. I call aloud. Everywhere I search. . . . No, that verandah is *not* mine, but a verandah sparkling with lights. More than ever anxiously I call aloud, I quest, I scour one great hall after another. No longer am I in my own rooms. My own rooms are simple, homely, retired—there is in them none of this cold, glimmering sheen, and their windows have no peeping cherry-trees outside. . . . Once more I traverse, pace and pace, one great hall after another. Yet my rooms must surely be *somewhere*? . . .

The notches on the stump, the scurrying ants, arise before me again as my temporarily clouded vision regains its bearings. Yes, I am looking only upon the familiar trees. It was my old dream returned to me for a moment. I need not hurry. Before me is my little dwelling once more. But the knocking? Oh, the knocking was merely Tamarka. I can hear her lowing now at the entrance-gates.

The peacock gives a wild cry. Evidently something has frightened it. Then what? How could anything out of the way happen *now*?

To my ears from shoreward comes, in the far-reaching voice of a woman:

“Good people, look, only look!”

Something seems to be afoot in "The Professors' Haven."

Yet the "Haven" has long been dead. The bells of its boarding-houses no longer ring down guests to luncheon or to dinner, for every bell of the kind has been wrenched from its fastenings and converted into liquor, or made into rifle-bullets, in case there should yet be remaining anyone to be shot. And my ears have ceased to catch the trills of languishing vocalists at eventide, or the strains of Chaikovsky's *Trio*. Musicians and vocalists alike are fallen silent. The scores of the *Trio* are fluttering on bazaar-stalls.

By this time more than one voice is arising from below. So people still dwell down there? "The Haven" still does harbour some human beings?

"Good friends, look! Do look!"

Friends no longer exist. Nor does goodness. But still, down there, are the villa "Golden Rose," with its blush rose-tinted walls, and the villa "Marina," and the villa "Anna," even though for tenants now those establishments have only slumber owls, the little owls which one can hear making the night ring with their cry of "Spli-oo-oo, spli-oo-oo!"¹ as though really it were possible nowadays for people to "sleep and fear not!" Also there is a skeleton of "The Lindens" surviving. It is a villa which once stood surrounded with pink oleanders in green tubs; but now the villa's "worthy," "industrious" gardeners have ousted the oleanders and converted their tubs into firewood. As for the one-time proprietor of the place, he was a retired admiral who, after building for himself this new vessel, this new shoregoing craft, loved to take up his station on the balcony and, a figure of sea-salt and spotless white from beard to soft white shoes, to sweep the offing with a telescope, and then, cigar in mouth, to pace to and fro in quiet enjoyment of the fact that now he had exchanged the storms of ocean for calm home waters, a cutlass for a workman's chopper, a heaving quarter-deck for restful paths of gravel, and bulwarks for a taffrail of pink oleander, blue glycerine, and peach and orange. But one day some men arrived who smashed his telescope and

¹ "I am asleep! I am asleep!"

laid him beneath the ground, so that his "retirement" might be absolutely complete. And that done, there stepped aboard the "ship" one Koriak, a huge ex-coachman who had previously taken the precaution of attaching himself to the admiral's family—yes, and to the admiral's cow—as a means towards the end of eventually annexing the establishment wholesale. For that little paradise of vineyard and garden was exactly the place for one who daily had toiled at the heavy task of driving the admiral to town in a Tartar chaise! Ah well! Now Koriak is lord of—a wilderness. Even the place's window-frames have been broken up for fuel. . . .

The voices below grow louder and louder, and then above them there comes floating to me again the woman's voice.

"Good people," she wails, "do look at what he is doing!"

"Oh, I'll tear the guts out of you! Oh, I'll make you pay for my Riabka!"

That last voice, rather that last hoarse bellow, is Koriak's own.

"Good people, he is killing my man!"

"My me-e-eat, or I'll rip out your gullet! What have you done with it? If you don't tell me I'll burst in your stomach for you! Oh, I'll make you two stinkers pay for my Riabka!"

"Uncle Stepan, I swear I was in Yalta all last week, so that I *can't* have touched your cow. Ask the neighbours if it isn't as I say. How can you knock an old man about in such a way?"

"Knocking an old man about?" What does that wailing voice mean, and that animal bellow?

"You cur, you scum! Give me back my me-e-eat! Why should *you* have your bastards walking about in fine clothes when I'm a working-man? You've killed off the bourgeois and now you want to do the same with us. But I'll make you pay for Riabka, you scum, you devil!"

"Then I shall go to the Revolutionary Committee and tell them what you did with the admiral's money-boxes."

"Will you, indeed? Then what about yourself? You'll only be giving yourself away, for many's the time that *you've* betrayed folk in order to steal their stuff and taken it to the

bazaar. Why, you and that precious committee are all of a piece. So I'll shake the life out of you whilst I can. Give me back my meat."

"Help, help, good people!"

Then I hear a dull blow, and the sound of something colliding violently with the earth.

"He has killed him! He has killed him! Good people, he has murdered my man!"

"Aye, it's to death that I mean to beat him. Don't talk to me. I've little ones to fend for."

Then over and amongst the ridges there arises the stir of a crowd of human beetles crawling from their hiding-places in order to perch themselves on vantage-points and, shading their eyes, watch the forecourt of "The Lindens" like the spectators in an old Greek theatre. Far below, on a narrow plateau at the bottom of "The Haven," the spectators can see a blur of grey smoke over a white villa, a courtyard in which two objects which might be human beings or might be clothes-bags are wriggling, and running away from the first two objects a third in blue, waving a stick as it runs.

Verba's children run out crying:

"Oh, people are killing one another at 'The Lindens'!"

"Then go and see after Tamarka, Yasha."

"But I want to see the killing first," is Yasha's reply.

Other neighbours come out to look, and I hear Lialia's voice exclaim:

"Oh, Mamma, it is Stepan Koriak! That is he in the white shirt, with one of his knees digging into the other man's stomach!"

"Lialia,"—this from the old lady—"you are *not* to look. To think that people can be such beasts! Lialichka, you *are* to go indoors. Go, for God's sake! Nurse, what is it all about?"

"I don't know," I hear Nurse reply in her carrying voice. "But I *think* that Koriak is giving the joiner a thrashing for killing his cow."

The old lady mounts a stool to get a better view.

"What a mess they've made of the place!" she comments. "They've stripped it pretty well of *everything*! Yet here has one man killed a cow that wasn't his property (though his woman Marishka receives a daily ration of mutton and butter and real bread, and any amount of wine), and here is the other fellow giving him a thrashing! Why, I believe he's going to kill him!"

She gazes upon the scene with never a thought of what may be awaiting herself, with never a thought of the possibility that already her own pitiful life has had its fatal knot tied. Blood ever demands blood.

So the howls and cries on the old Greek stage grow louder and the blows more frequent.

"He-e-elp, friends!"

"Oh, I'll rip out your liver, you dirty spawn! Tell me what's become of the meat. Tell me what you've done with it."

Someone amongst an invisible group of onlookers says:

"His sons who live in the town are always informing."

"Aye—and he a Bolshevik! But he's a Bolshevik only where other folks' property is concerned. When it comes to touching his own he very soon kicks up a racket."

"If the cow really was Koriak's, Koriak has a right to thrash him for it. Come what may, one shouldn't steal a cow. But, as a matter of fact, you can lock up anything in these days and some night prowler'll be off with it."

"It's all come of the accursed bourgeois. And so, as they've had their comfortable time, let them go under now."

The Greek play is approaching its finale, and the bellow growing deeper and seeming to rasp the throat as it issues.

"Where is my me-eat?"

"Mamma, I'm going indoors now."

From one and another ridge come cries of:

"Knock him out now, Koriak, and finish him off!"

"But oughtn't the matter to be proved first? 'Knock him out,' indeed! Why, some of you folk are all for killing."

"Well, when she was in Yalta his woman used to inform against someone every day."

"Oh, these people are beasts, not human beings! Lialia, go

indoors. Yes, I tell you to go indoors. You oughtn't to hear such things."

"But, Mamma, I want to stay outside."

The doctor unfurls his umbrella and joins the other gazers. Then shading his eyes and wagging his beard to and fro, he shouts to the void at large:

"With the mountains for a setting, we have here another tragedy, a veritable battle of the Titans! See the wolves tearing at one another! Go it, my friends! Finally achieve the Apotheosis of Culture! My best respects!"

And with that he departs for his "almond orchard."

At this point Yasha, Nurse's second son, a long-legged stripling old enough to go out with the fishermen, comes running from a ridge and calls to me excitedly:

"As soon as ever Koriak started in the affair was over. He hit the old man between the shoulders and laid him out at once, though the old man was tough enough."

"Go away! Go away!" the old lady cries with an hysterical pressing of her hands to her ears. "I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

Suddenly Lialia sounds the tocsin of:

"A hawk! A hawk! Ai-i-u-oo-ai!"

Sure enough, the scene of Koriak's late throttling of the slayer of kine has hovering over it the outspread yellowish-red wings and white breast-patch of a scavenger of the air.

"Mind your poultry!" screams Lialia. "Mind your poultry, I say!"

And with the words she dances, stamps her feet, and claps her hands.

"See, now!" she goes on. "It has stooped behind those oak-bushes. Look at that bit of, down floating up! Ai-iu-oo-ai!"

And as I too sight the white, fluffy speck sailing over the twigs of oaken scrub I leap the nearest hillock of soft earth and put my best efforts forward. Yet constantly I keep stumbling over sticks and stones in the dried torrent-bed, and intermittently I hear voices trying to scare the bird and hands being clapped.

"The clump of oak! The clump of oak! The wretch has flown up again!"

Over me go sailing outstretched talons and a white breast streak as the dark-winged scavenger soars seaward and vanishes like a predatory phantom.

I arrive to find something which once was a pullet and now has ceased to be one. Before me lie a ripped-off head with closed eyes and comb already cold, some blood, and a little heap of feathers. And from the dead wattles' colour I see that the remains once belonged to "The Glutton." Yet only an hour ago she was fluttering in my hands, consuming the doctor's peas, and reflecting golden light-points from her clear eyes! . . . Well, good-bye, pet! You have passed away with not a single morsel of your body intact, just as not a single thing around us is left intact. Ah well! The power to feel is lessening. Indifference has set in.

Nevertheless it is with care that I raise the little blood-stained ball of feathers. After all, that ball represents more than a clot of flesh. Lately it was the kindly creature which used to talk to us and dumbly share our every misfortune. So for the second time this weary day I shoulder my heavy spade, and reseek the quiet corner near the fence, the quiet spot beside the glowing outcrop. . . . Then, as I am looking for a stone which may prevent the dogs from digging her up again, the wattle fence creaks and Yasha is seen watching me.

"You had better have given her to me."

And he may be right. Besides, nothing matters now. . . . Then shall it be the earth, or shall it be Yasha's gullet? Preferably the former, for at least the earth is quiescent.

Yasha's eyes probe the stone, and in them there is a questing expression. So I determine that, darkness come, I will effect exhumation and a reburial in the Vineyard Ravine.

Standing beneath the cedar-tree, the turkey-hen, with one glittering eye upturned to the heavens, has her four remaining chicks close huddled to her breast. It is as though the poor little things were shivering over their own grave. Like every other creature in this land, they have only hunger and terror and death to look to. For what a cemetery the country has

become! Yet sunshine still is everywhere. Still it is making the mountains glow as though redhot. Still it is covering the sea with a sheen of blue undulance.

In "The Haven" below silence has fallen. On the ridges above the spectators have climbed back to their lairs. What matter if Koriak *has* killed someone? The word "murder" no longer has a meaning.

Again I pace the garden to wear myself out. But how can I wear myself out? How can I hope wholly to rid myself of the faculty of thought, to convert myself into a stone? The thing is impossible. . . .

O Sun of Truth, my life long have I sought Thee. But where art Thou now? What is the aspect of Thy countenance? Not enough for me are a plot of land and its figurings. I desire rather the immeasurable! I desire rather the scent of Thy savour. But Thy Face is gone from me, and I can but discern the boundlessness of my woe, of my suffering; I can but discern the flesh-clothed Evil which ever is gathering unto itself fresh strength. . . . Ah, that strident howl, that beast-like utterance! How it rings and rings still in my ears!

And where now are *you*, you great thinkers of the world, now that your homes have been blotted out amid wreaths of smoke? Whither is fled Pure Reason? Whither is gone all that radiant realm of ideas in which the fecund human brain stood mirrored? O you spirits oppressed, in what sphere are you now abiding? What is your present guise? Are you now dissolved and become sunlight, or a company of incorporeal beings? Have you, to compensate you for your unmerited sufferings and your unrequited wrongs, achieved rebirth and changed to a new and unknown entity? Maybe some wondrous happening is causing you to redescend to earth in the form of rain? Maybe you are bestriding the land in the rainbow? Maybe you are falling upon the land with the meteor? Again, the form of your dissolution may have been altogether otherwise, and led to your becoming material for barter, or paper wherein to wrap dog-meat, or waddings for guns? Well, certainly it has come about that bazaar wares are being displayed upon pages torn from the Sermon on the Mount,

and parcels are being made of the Holy Gospels! . . . Ah, the heavens are blue and empty. Blue and empty is the sea. The one is even as the other.

Nevertheless, once eventide has come I—but whom do I mean by “I,” seeing that I am but a stone rolling to and fro in the sunlight, and though possessed of eyes and ears destined to be kicked hither and thither for ever? For I cannot go hence of my own free will: on the one side of me stand the glittering, ethereal-looking mountains and on the other side lies the eternally sporting sea, and beyond those two lie silence and mist. Is it even profitable to look at them?

Over there is a little town. And in that little town there is a cellar. And in that cellar some men with ashen faces and death-confronted eyes are lying huddled. Men they are, seven of them, who until recently were roaming the mountains. And now, owing to a treacherous trick, they are *there*, in that trap. What, I ask myself, must be the feeling of their flesh under those riveted fetters? I myself have a certain liberty of movement, but *they* have only one road left open to them. And that road is the road to the tomb. At the wharf a destroyer is lying moored. Shortly it will have become their iron coffin, for only until nightfall have its crew, after feasting upon mutton and drinking full of wine, sought sleep like the red pennant above them.

Yet surely did not the doctor say something about it?—He did. What he said was that “something may happen even yet.” And with the thought I glance at the heavens. What could happen?—Ah, the glare hurts my eyes!

Again I pace the garden—gazing upon the stones. *What*, indeed, could happen? A miracle? Then let me go and stand under the cedar-tree to await it. The tree seems to gasp at me as though stifled by the surrounding cypresses. Everywhere are drought, depression and decay. The sun makes one’s very thoughts swim. I stand beneath the cedar and regard my little house and tiny verandah. Do I really live there, in that dwelling whose verandah, with its coloured roof-glass, returns my gaze with tear-filled eyes, whose flowers of glycerine

plants have long since fallen, whose yew-trees fronting the porch are standing withered?

Only on the waste space beyond the ravine is there some movement. That movement is centred around the carcass of Liarva, where Verba's dogs Tsigan and Bielka are busy.

Someone shouts to me from the roadway:

"That's right! Break her up for cutlets."

It is the voice of Uncle Andrei who lives in "Tikhaia Pristan," once the villa of a police inspector. He, Uncle Andrei, is dressed quite *à la* country gentleman, in canvas suit and soft felt hat, and for the rest is thick-set, swarthy, round-backed, and—somehow, dark all over. Always one can see him either sitting about on hillocks, or looking at villas, or walking to and fro through the rustling undergrowth, and—*calculating*.

I make no reply. The stir around Liarva goes on as before.

"You see, man must live," Andrei continues. "Nowadays even a rubbish-heap is best looked at twice. Take the Tartars of Kazan. *They* know good beef when they see it!¹ You too would make meat. However, even if I had, and expected to have, nothing else in the way of food, fare of that sort would always seem to me foul and poisonous."

Still I make no reply, and he approaches closer.

"What most attracts my eye," is his next remark, "is your turkey-hen. I feel as though I were courting her! But how come you to have her at all?—though I admit that you have been clever to keep her as long as you have done, and even to use her for hatching out chicks. Unfortunately capital of the sort is apt to get knocks on the head. Why, that goose of Verba's was carried off, that night, as though there hadn't been a single dog about the place. Well, man himself has become a dog. In passing, I have exchanged my young pig for some barley. Also I have earned five *vedra* of wine by doing some digging work for some Tartars. So now I ought to last out until the spring, when I shall get rid of my cow, buy some meal with the proceeds, add to it some of the carcass, and live like a gentleman. But I wanted to speak

¹ A reference to the cannibalism said to have occurred in that region.

to you about that peacock. Why should it go on walking about by itself? *Someone* should eat it, or else take it to the bazaar. There is more than one rich Tartar woman who would make a bid for its tail. Tartar women use such feathers for their hair instead of flowers. And anyway they'd find the bird's meat not come amiss."

With which Uncle Andrei resumes his saunter and his calculations.

The peacock? Well, it is mine if it is anyone's. So why should it not be bartered for tobacco, now that I have only a shred left? Suppose I wait for it this very evening? Yes, I might do so, even though nightfall is the hour when memories most come flocking back to me. At nightfall alone can I do it, for the peacock has become so wild as otherwise to be uncatchable. And certainly it would make good exchange for tobacco—even for wheat.

So I cast my eyes about me, and presently sight the bird once more. As usual, it is roaming the piece of waste ground, with trailing tail. Well, shall it go to decorate a rich Tartar woman? For that matter, is there any rich Tartar woman still in existence? I eye my "tobacco"; I seek to appraise it. It returns my gaze. My eyes fall. Ah, I cannot wholly crush down the remembrance of those joyous mornings, the mornings begun for us by the bird calling from the house-roof, and tap-tap-tapping upon the iron sheeting! Were the bird now to go life would become darker than ever.

I sink down upon the stonework of the verandah steps, which are growing cooler as the villa masks the sun. And my eyes then fall upon my parched vegetable-plots, whence also the sun's rays are gradually slipping. Before me I see only withered cucumbers, and tomatoes so pecked to strips of red as scarcely to be worth watering. Then I look upon the shingly ground at my feet, where a few ants are scurrying about around a hole. So *they* seem to have plans for the future? One of them in particular seems plunged in reflection. Evidently he is a thinker. See him feeling about with his antennæ! I take a dry twig of yew and brush it lightly

over the soil. A-a-ah! Where now, O ants, are your plans and your philosophy?—Vanished, like everything else, for always there is a hidden force to sweep away everything. Even the sun going round in that circle—will it *always* go round in that circle, or may not the day come when the same hidden force sweeps it too into nothingness?

TO THE
ANTHROPOLOGICAL

THE WONDERFUL NECKLACE

WHEN will night come to hide from me this glittering cemetery? The sun seems temporarily to have halted in his departure, and taken up his stand over Babugan. Perhaps he has not yet seen all that he wishes to see? Then gaze away, O Sun! Maybe the destroyer at the wharf has so pleased you that you wish to flash to its pennant a last greeting, a last "good night!"

The men aboard of her will have scented dusk by now and awakened, and, clad in their black oilskins, be either pacing the deck or clapping their hands at the dolphins to allay their palms' itching.

Ah! The sun *is* sinking after all, and making the Sudakian Hills seem all of gold under the evening glow, and turning Demerdzhi a tint of dull, undulant, copperish rose until, as the sun passes behind the mountain, it turns again to blue. For a few moments Demerdzhi's fringe of pine-tops stands out against the gilding behind it; then the mountain becomes solely grim and severe, solely a thing of night, and seems to draw menacingly nearer. The clefts in its slopes are showing black. From those clefts I always fancy that night first stretches forth its terrors and alarms, as shots ring through the darkness to menace, to inspire dread.

Also, when I shall have given you the last shreds of leaf, must you, my gentle poultry, prepare yourselves for the night. And here comes the peacock to display its tail and dance. But what is the good of that, Pavka, when I have nothing to give you for the dancing, but rather am thinking of bartering you to a rich Tartar, and thereby giving you cause indeed to dance?

Tentatively I steal towards the bird. Unfortunately the creature seems to scent something. At all events it eyes me

sharply—then swings on to my gate and plunges away into the gloom.

Next I watch my all too light and empty pullets flutter on to the ledge of their coop. The turkey-hen, however, persists in standing beside the clean-picked bowl and probing me with one eye. Come, turkey-hen! I have nothing more for you.

So the day ends. It has been a dateless, seemingly purposeless and superfluous day. But days now are become a mere whirligig to me until night falls, and I can seat myself on my threshold and watch the stars till dawn. How those stars twinkle! Poets have sung them, the wise have gazed at them as into mirrors, and long yet will do so. Then are these dying worlds strewn about in those black interspaces? And is it up there that you, O spirit of suffering, O spirit so akin to my own, have your habitation? What, indeed, have those extinct spheres scattered about amongst them? And is blood shed there as here, and agony endured? And are the holy and the unholy things of our own sphere things that, in the stars, represent only so much twinkling?

But I receive no reply, nor shall I ever do so, for it is only over an expanse of waste that those green and blue, those gleaming, glittering worlds of slowly cooling fire are playing their unheard music. Yes, they are worlds shattered, they are worlds consuming like so many rubbish heaps. . . .

Behind me comes the sound of soft, tired, earthly footsteps. So it is you, then?—and together, shoulder to shoulder, we sit and think. Yet we have lost all power of thought: we are become as stones which, after spending thousands of years in inert meditation and grinding against one another, fall apart and pass away into nothing.

Ah! See that star falling with a luminous streak in its train! Yes, I know what you are thinking, my companion. But what you are thinking will never come about. The stars ever have proved deaf to our appeals. Neither they nor the stones have ever vouchsafed us utterance. . . .

“Good evening!” says a voice out of the darkness.

And easily I recognise the voice as that of the neighbour

who sojourned for a while in Paris. She has used the starlight to find her way to us, in spite of the briars catching at her clothing.

So all three sit awhile in silence. Then, with a long sigh, she says:

"To-day Nurse took my gold watch-chain to be sold, Vasili Semenitch's old chain. Yet, though it weighed six *zlotniki*, all that she got for it was six pounds of bread—*six pounds*."

No reply comes—we continue gazing seaward and upwards towards where the stars are displaying their sparkle-flecked streamers.

"My head is mazed now," the old lady at last continues. "I can neither think nor sleep, but only walk up and down like a pendulum. And those bits of children are pining away."

Outside the garden, beyond the brier-bushes, something rustles. Then someone fumbles at the latch of the gate.

"Who is there?"

"Anuta," a childish voice replies diffidently. "Anuta. Mamma's little girl."

"Anuta? What do you want, then?"

"Mamma told me to come. Mamma Nastia did."

Then I remember that she must be the little girl from the stuccoed dwelling on the slope down there, the dwelling tenanted by one Grigori Odariuk—a joiner, an *ex*-caretaker of villas, and the present proprietor of one.

I go to the gate, and see before me a little six-year-old girl with a flaxen pigtail. I remember her well—remember her playing in her parents' garden and lisping to me as I passed: "Dood mo-o-orning, *balin*¹!"

Even in the darkness she is visible, though she persists in standing outside the wicket, and picking nervously at the gate-post. Only when I again ask her what she wants does she reply, sobbing quietly:

"Mamma says, 'Please give us something. The baby is dying. It has even given up crying.' If only we could have a

¹ For "*barin*," "*sir*."

few groats for porridge!—Papa has gone away to sell bedsteads.”

Hopelessly I gaze at this little creature which has fallen into the net with the rest of us. And then I gaze at the dark masses of the mountains, and then at the black void within which I know the town to be lying. Only one light is visible there, the destroyer's red “eye,” as though to show that this night at least one eye has remained open.

What can I give the suppliant?

Her only request is either to be allowed to search the ground for poultry leavings or to be allowed to take a few of last year's vine-shoots, which she declares she can feel for even in the dark, so acute is her sense of touch.

But there are no poultry leavings available, and I tell her so. Upon that she stands looking at me much as the turkey-hen does—with one eye at a time. And meanwhile her very breathing seems to be saying, “Isn't there a single bit left?” For she resembles Tamarka in the fact that she cannot understand what has happened. All that she understands is that her Mamma has sent her upon an errand.

Eventually she departs with a small handful of groats in paper, whilst I remain standing by the gate to listen to her footfalls as, crossing the nightbound ridge, she makes for her stuccoed home below the hill. By day that home is of a painful yellow colour, but at the moment, mercifully, it is invisible. And in it five souls are wasting away. Yet once, I can remember, Odariuk was a sturdy peasant on a State holding who earned a good living by working in Sevastopol as a journeyman carpenter. Then the Revolution called a halt to all such labour—swept him aside with the rest: whereupon he took the seemingly easiest road, and started to annex the furniture—bedsteads, crockery, washhand-basins, and so forth—of a boarding-house, and crossed the mountains to exchange them for wheat, wine and lard. And when the boarding-house's more movable effects had thus been eaten and drunken away, and it was still apparent that a joiner was someone whom nobody wanted, and that the only other resources were work in the “Soviet Gardens” for half a pound

of bread a day and the few unslaughtered cows that still were roaming the countryside, Odariuk turned back to the boarding-house, broke up its window-frames, dismounted its doors and unnailed its linoleum. And still there remains to him its iron roofwork. And in any case a man's affairs are his own, and a man must live. Why, that had been the case even under the Tsarist dispensation. . . .

The night pursues its way.

"Yes, I cannot even think," moans the old lady. Then she adds: "Do you know, I have still got an alarm-clock left."

An alarm-clock? Why, who would want an alarm-clock? In these days the happiest thing would be to fall asleep and never wake again.

"Yes, and something else, too." But the old lady's tone begins to falter. "Now—now just take a look at that something else. It consists of the finest stones only."

And she opens a little box—producing thence, as she does so, a sound as of peas rattling—and draws forth a necklace which flashes faintly in the starlight.

"A truly wonderful necklace it is," she goes on. "Do look at its beauty!"

I pass the elastic string of alternately large and small, many-faceted stones through my fingers. And as I do so the stones make a delicate tinkling.

Yet though her tone of regret is the tone of one thinking of parting with something really valuable, who now would give her anything for such an article? Oh, the old fool!

"But, you see, it means so much to me!"

In a flash, *then*, I realise the state of the case—realise that in each of those crystal-like beads there is reposing a morsel of her soul. However, souls no longer exist. Nothing that is sacred has any longer an existence, for the last coverings have been stripped off, and pectoral crosses are being exchanged for drink, and beloved features are being mutilated, and farewells and benedictions are being thrust back into the utterers' mouths, and terms of kindness are being stamped into dustbins under heavy boots, and cries from the tomb are sent quavering down the highways for the winds to scatter.

Things of the sort are childish folly! More than time is it that they were abolished! . . .

"Yes, for me so much is bound up with the necklace, for Vasilii Semenitch bought it for me on the Boulevard des Italiens in Paris, and paid three hundred francs for it. In those days, you must remember, such a price was a gigantic sum. Well, what would it amount to now? To a hundred and twenty gold roubles, do you say? Then what a quantity of bread, of good plain bread, we could now have bought with it!"

"Yes. And at that time you could have bought with it one hundred and twenty poods of bread."

"Wha-a-at? Oh, it *can't* be!"

"Yes, and a little over two hundred of black bread."

"Two—hundred? Then, at the rate of two poods a month we could have made the bread last us twenty years!"

"Eight," I correct.

"My God!" She presses the necklace to her breast, and her face is hidden from me. "Then there would have been eight years' life in this for the children!—Oh, it *can't* be! It is all like a nightmare. We must have lost our sense of reckoning just as we have lost everything else. How could o-o-oven bread be so cheap?"

"O-o-oven bread?" The strange forgotten phrase recurs to my mind with difficulty. "Oven bread?"—We have lost more than our sense of reckoning! We have lost life itself. We have lost it and everything else even as the dead lose them.

"Oven bread!" Again I peer at the phrase long slipped from my memory. Then I remember it—then faintly (yet none the less actually) catch a keen, spicy smell of busy bakehouses; see dark, blackened loaves ranged on barrow and on shelf, and on boys' heads, and on stalls, and on pavements; sniff the thornapple-like scent of hot rye dough; hear crisp, cleaving cuttings of great whetted, plunged-in knives; behold teeth and lips chewing and smacking with delight; behold distended gullets jerking, swallowing, and—

"Those were days when a working-man could earn a rouble

a day, or more. So in those days he could have earned sixty-six pounds of o-o-oven bread, whereas now——”

“More softly, for God’s sake!”

“—Whereas now, on the Volga grain-lands, millions of people are dying of sheer starvation, and the wireless telling the world that everyone has got enough!”

“Softer, softer, I beg of you!”

So we are silent for a moment. The stars twinkle.

“Yes, three hundred francs this necklace cost, for it is a simply wonderful piece of work. And how well I remember the day when we bought it! The day was a hot day in June, which is the Parisian season, and that night *The Huguenots* was to be given at the Opera. Of course, Vasilii Semenitch and I had very little money, for he was attending the Sorbonne, and I was helping him to learn the language: but that day we decided to take a holiday, and began it by visiting the Louvre. And oh, the streets that morning! You must know that the Parisian pavements are very wide; and therefore, what with the sun-blinds hanging over them and the waiters serving coffee under the sun-blinds, and the ladies’ dresses, and the crowds of people, mostly foreigners, the streets were an unbelievable sight. And everywhere there were top-hatted coachmen with long whips driving about, and throngs upon throngs of people eating ices and *bouches-zéphires* at little tables, and drinking coloured liquors, until, my God, it all seemed like a dream. And then there were peaches heaped in baskets, and apricots, and strawberries which I can smell still, and ladies in white hats trimmed with gold lace and ribands (as was then the fashion), and flowers and flowers and flowers—flowers in bouquets, in baskets, in breast knots, and in people’s hands—roses, lilies and lilacs. Even as I sit here now their delicious scent is in my nostrils. Especially do I remember an old man who had three sun-flowers in his buttonhole, and kept offering others to people whom he met. ‘*Voyez, monsieur!*’ ‘*Merci, monsieur!*’ And some gave him money. Yes, all this was forty years ago, yet it seems as fresh to me as to-day—for it was the spring-time of my youth! . . . So Vasilii Semenitch and I too ate

strawberry ices; and once he dropped his cigar into an ice. How everyone laughed! And there was a lame newsboy who kept saying cheekily, '*Bon appétit, messieurs!*'—Are things still the same in Paris, I wonder? Even now I can see the steaming of the watered roadways and the horses' glittering hoofmarks. . . . So we stopped before a showcase which had in it this very, very thing which I have here—which I have *here!*"

Again I run the stones through my fingers. They feel cool to the touch, and make a "clok-clokking" against one another.

"And so delighted was I with the necklace that I could but look at it and look at it. And at length Vasilii Semenitch said, 'Shall we go in and buy it?' (for he never could deny my anything), but it was—well, there! it was such a sum. However, I still stood as though entranced, and could not tear myself away. 'How I should delight in it!' I said—and eventually it had to be bought. We entered the shop. And oh, that love of a shop! Everything in it glittered, and goodness only knows how many gems it must have contained! And the shopkeeper, too, was so nice, and so elegant! At this very moment I can see him—a black-eyed Frenchman wearing a pink tie and tie-pin, and having his slightly grizzled hair smartly curled. Yes, a real *bon-vivant* he was. That is how *bons-vivants* always look. And always they smell of scent. *He* smelt of sweet orange. '*Que voulez-vous, madame?*' To which I replied as though I had been a real Parisienne, and we had a delightful talk. And next a Spanish lady, a real lady *à la* Napoleon III. (though I can't remember her name), came in, and the proprietor placed a piece of velvet about her throat—then clasped upon it the necklace. And *then* it looked marvellous, simply marvellous! Yes, and then he led us into a little room full of mirrors, and turned on a light so as to make its millions and millions of diamonds sparkle like a magic picture—yes, all for *my* benefit. '*La, la, madame!* Diamonds are so much money. To buy them is as good as putting money into a bank. In any case, this necklace is a *chef-d'œuvre* in itself, for it represents the last thing made by an old Italian workman who could cut facets as no one else could

do, but is now dead. Hence work like his will never reappear, and the less so because people have grown less fastidious and less appreciative of artistry. Ah, a grand artist that Italian was!" So the necklace was bought, and that night we went to hear *The Huguenots*, and when I walked in the *foyer* everyone looked at me, and probably took me for a great lady. . . . And yesterday, though I have never been parted from these stones for forty years, a Greek had the insolence to offer me for them—well, what do you suppose he offered? He offered me three—pounds—of—bread!"

"He wouldn't have offered a crumb for a human being."

"Perhaps so. But only look at the necklace. Strike a match."

A match! Why, I have not possessed such a thing for ages. However, I strike a flint sufficiently to make some tinder glow. To fan it to an actual flame would be dangerous.

"It has eighty-seven stones in it, and on each stone there are forty facets! So there you have the facets' total. Yet no more than three—pounds—of—bread for them!"

The old fool! Facets? How many facets has a human soul, and how many necklaces have been ground into the soil and their owners murdered?

"I said to the Greek, 'At least give me *ten* pounds,' but he replied, 'Do you suppose I can *eat* jewels?' 'Have you a conscience?' I cried; and says he, 'A conscience? A conscience? What is a conscience? For myself, I go in only for plain business dealings, for I know that they'll pay me better than any conscience will. See here, now. If I were to buy this necklace of you, I could not pass it on to Europe, or to America, or to any country where business still is being carried on, without first taking it to Yalta. And of course you know what going to Yalta means, and that the going thither would cost me—well, cost me nearly as much as if I went abroad. For you don't suppose that our Bolshevik masters are angels exactly? Before I could get a permit to dispose of the necklace I should have to go and hang about Yalta at least for two hours. Otherwise within two hours I should be—well, I should be lying out in a ravine. And before my permit was got, again, I should have lost a

good deal of other stuff—there's no need for me to say exactly what. Yes, I know what I am talking about. I've been to Yalta four times already on such errands, and been skinned three times out of the four. Oh, there's folk in the town who like guzzling as much as you do—and like gold and diamonds as well. However, I won't *absolutely* refuse to buy the stones, but give you three pounds of bread for them—three days more life. My conscience won't let me go farther.' " . . .

I glance towards where the stars' spangled reflections are dancing on the surface of the sea. Then I glance towards Kastel on the right. Then I glance in Yalta's direction, and remember that recently that town of vineyards had its amber name changed to a very different one, since some half-drunken hangman rechristened our abode of sunshine and sea-salt "Krasnoarmeisk,"¹ and thereby strewed Yalta's white lilies with the filth of the barrack-room, with a reek of ragamuffin-soldier, with the obscenity of the besotted slave, and masked and bedaubed all the wondrous beauty of its countenance. "Krasnoarmeisk"? A name stinking only of intolerance and cruelty! It meets one like a gob of coarse spittle spat into one's eyes!

Whence do you come, you "creators of a new life" who dully, recklessly have thrown away all the savings of the Russian people and defiled her saints' tombs, and even rifled the dust of that Christian warrior Alexander Nevski—violated the last sleep of a national protector whom you never knew, and, after shattering Russia's memorials and blotting out both her name and her likeness, and rendering her dumb, now have sent her forth into the world as a poor reborn creature of unknown lineage? . . . Ah, my Russia! With what beguilements have you thus become enslaved? With what vintage have they thus contrived to render you drunken?

Under similar circumstances, would *your* pride, O other nations, have suffered your national names to become wiped out? England, ancient England, France, elegant France—cleave to your swords and helms, mightily shield your-

¹ "Town of the Red Army."

selves with your bucklers still. Otherwise even you may yet see your great ships of State founder under the raging tempest of human villainy. Yes, even you may one day meet with such a fate. Proud London, hem about your great fane at Westminster with the Fiery Cross. Never let the hour dawn which might leave you powerless to recognise your own features. Within your borders there are many men of no race, ignorant of the Cross, yet waiting, watching to crunch, crunch with their jaws. And within your borders are many vaults heaped with gold. And within your borders are many pockets heaped with nothing at all.

Yet, though I gaze towards the town once known as Yalta without being able actually to see it, well do I know that at this moment there are trickling, trickling through it the earnings of a whole people—that, filched equally from the living and from the dead and percolating through hundreds of hands, those earnings are pouring into the sea there like a mighty river, and that steamers and felugas are conveying them thence to Amsterdam and London and Europe and even far San Francisco. O ancient Europe, pause before you handle that merchandise, lest thereby you lose the wondrous necklace of your good repute.

Fathers and mothers, if you would defend your countries from peril, let not your eyes see brazen-faced hangmen walking clad in your sons' clothing: let not them see murderers violating your daughters and seducing them with stolen gauds.

But meanwhile your so-called "leaders of thought" are rejoicing over this new thing which has come into the world. Well, exult over it, O leaders! Seek not to excuse it, seeing that it is bootless to bewail our agonies with pathos of words whilst all the time you are doing homage to the most cruel taskmasters whom the world has ever seen, and thus helping them to slay the soul of a great people. You profess that you are instructing Europe's masses, do you not? Soon, with thieves and murderers, you will be sitting crouched upon those masses' bones, and grinding into fragments Europe's last vestiges of tradition. Pooh! it is not of the living, but of the dead, that you are instructors. . . .

Continues the old lady in her moaning, droning voice:

"With those children, though, to think of, what else can I do? Even though Michael Vasilievitch brought them a few peas just now, those peas were his last. He himself is eating acorns and bitter almonds, grinding grape-pips in a coffee-mill, making them up into 'pies,' and talking about a 'self-experimenting' for the purpose of a book which he intends to write. You know, he isn't quite—well, quite *himself*. What had I better do? For the children's sake I would at once let the necklace go abroad. But—but *three pounds* of bread only!"

I cannot sit and listen to her any longer. I rise and wander away over the garden, and entangle myself in shrubs and trip over clods. All the time I am longing for a breath of fresh air. But from the clay of the soil there comes only a sense of oppression, even as there does also from the chirruping of the night-beetles and from the heavens. The night is black now. The young crescent moon has set, and the sinister hour is approaching when men with faces either masked or lamp-blackened walk abroad, turn other people's faces to the wall and plunder. No one now has protection. At any moment those men may arrive, knock at our outer gates and shout the words which open all doors to them, the words, "Admittance in the Committee's name!" whilst the neighbours lie listening with heads buried in the pillow.

St. I. ... the morning ... is still in the ...
to chop.

IN THE DEEP RAVINE

SEAWARD it is lightening, and the dawn is growing clearer, though the mountains still are night-wrapt, their clefts black, and the villas on their slopes blurs of faint white. I plunge into the chill of the morning and descend to the Deep Ravine.

I have with me an axe and a leathern strap. As I top the crest of the ~~edge~~ ^{the world} the world can be seen slumbering on the threshold of a new day. Well, it is an unhappy business now to awaken.

On the foothills the vineyards show faintly grey, but the beach's shingly stretches are not yet clearly distinguishable.

The red light ~~is~~ ^{is} burning on the destroyer. Evidently ~~The~~ ^{the} vessel is ~~delaying~~ ^{delaying} her departure, and ~~the seven~~ ^{the seven} passengers in her will ~~presumably~~ ^{presumably} live to greet another day. I strain my eyes into the ~~blur~~ ^{blur} in her direction, and by the growing light seaward can discern dark figures scurrying about the ~~wharf~~ ^{wharf}. Then are the seven men just going to be removed, or is the day now too far advanced for that? Usually deeds of this kind are perpetrated during the dead of night. Possibly at the last moment the executioners have decided to let their victims look upon one more sunrise over their native mountains.

Even as I am gazing, the masthead-light becomes extinguished and the vessel's funnel sends forth smoke. But why are no cocks to be heard hailing the morning, or early carts rattling along the highways? Have all ordinary sounds ~~been~~ ^{been} put an end to, so that only that syren's piercing, throbbing shriek ~~may salute the day?~~ ^{may salute the day?}

To my ears, though, comes a voice mournful of intonation. That voice is the voice which never fails to descend to us from the minaret dominating the little town like a tall white taper as to all the world it languidly, solitarily cries that above the mountains, and above the town, and above the

sea, and above all that in them is, there still abides, and will for ever abide, the great God Almighty, and that without His will ^{nothing} ~~ought~~ whatsoever can be done. "Raise unto Allah a prayer for the day which is at hand." ^{coming day} ~~coming day~~

Behind the destroyer a sudden swirl of foam appears, and putting to sea with a curved furrow in her track, the vessel ~~departs for Yalta~~ . . . ^{Sets out to sea. She goes to Yalta.}

~~There~~ were seven of those men in the command. All but one or two of them were Tartars, and for months they eked out an existence amongst the Pass's forests and crags, in endurance of snowstorms and rains. Repeatedly they were threatened. Always they refused to surrender. And hundreds such are still scattered about the Crimea. Reluctant to face the European unknown, they live by snaring quail in the osier-beds, and by catching duck with decoys. . . . But at length the Seven were caught with a promise of "pardon," and on the strength of that "word of honour" surrendered themselves and their arms. ~~As~~ They descended from the uplands, ~~descended~~ tanned to blackness, worn spare, and flashing the tense eyes of captured mountain-birds, they ~~never passed through a village~~ but they pressed shoulder closer to shoulder, peered into the corners, listened with bated breath to night-running motor-cars, and tightened their grasp upon their still retained rifles. And ever and again they would look wistfully back towards the crags which for so long had been their home, and had furnished them with camping places ~~on the rock~~; and just when they were feeling that at all costs they must return ~~thither men met~~ them in carriages, introduced themselves as "friends" and "comrades," persuaded the Seven to change their minds, plied them with mutton and liquor, and "fraternised," whilst in the rear, like shadows, lurked keen-eyed men in leathern coats, and others civilly questioned the Seven about their wild life in the Pass, about the "fools" still persistently remaining there, and—about the pathways thither. That done, the Seven had their weapons taken from them, for all was "peace" now, and to-morrow the Seven would "return to their villages." And the same night the Seven themselves were taken. And so to the present time, when

they are to be taken farther still, and seem to have set out thither already, with a plunge into the sea with stones about their necks for the end of their journey. . . .

As I gaze at the waters, and at the destroyer's swirling track, it occurs to me that down there, on the shore, the Seven's wives and mothers are standing, or else that those wives and mothers are watching the vessel's black hull from their mountain villages, and never guessing, as it cleaves the surface, its errand, but rather rejoicing over the "pardon" which has been accorded, and fully expecting to, to— For surely it is not possible to disbelieve authorities? . . .

By this time every tear in the land has been shed. Eyes now can merely go blind with grief. It was a blindness of that sort that came upon an old Tartar woman last autumn when, after seeing her officer-son beaten to death with rifle-butts, his executioners had sufficient compassion to say that *now* she might have his body. She had interceded, she had beaten her head upon the stones of the road, she had fallen at his murderers' feet: and when they said, "*Now* you can take him," she sank forward upon that remote mountain track-way, kissed his dying eyes, and received upon her mother's lap his last breath. Only the rocks and the beechen forests heard her speechless weeping. Then there came to her an old Tartar husbandman, a neighbour of hers. Drawing his fist across his eyes, he said: "Weep not so, good dame. After all, mother-earth is best."

But the authorities do not publish deeds of the kind. . . .

Wresting my gaze from the sea, I move onward and count my steps as I go in order to distract my thoughts. Here at last is the Deep Ravine. *It* will put an end to my reflections ~~as strenuously I hack at its embedded, thousand-year-old oaken stumps.~~ *What a strange, gloomy, deep, dark place.*

The walls of its "cup" are surmounted with a tangle of sea-comb, whilst over the sea-comb there rise the heavens. ~~How~~ *How* ~~ever~~ my business is chopping, and not thinking. If thoughts still should jostle me I must fling them away into the undergrowth, break them up, disperse them, gaze only upon those weird jests of Nature—the sea-comb tufts.

Not plants, indeed, are those tufts, but enchanted transformations, portents of mystery. See that green bronze candelabrum where it lies spreading afield its five branches! Who can have jettisoned it? Also blink your eyes for a moment, and you will perceive a derelict harp, an outworn relic of the past, to be thrust into the bushes, with an old hunchback raising an arm beside it. Behold likewise the coils of that serpent. Whenever the wind passes over them, they seem to come alive. ~~Good emblems~~ indeed are those three objects of decay, desolation and deceit. ^{Decay, desolation, deceit} Lastly I can see a blackened, mouldy cross projecting from the undergrowth, ~~yet~~ a cross which has no intention of going under, despite that a wisp of rag is clinging to it and that a superimposed bottleneck is whistling in the wind. That bottleneck is a relic of a time when once some sailors from Sevastopol amused themselves by shooting at a mark here. Oh, and behold where the wind has twisted a seacomb-shoot into a note of interrogation. And what is the question, the mysterious question? . . . Well, though everywhere else I will slash right and left, I will leave the cross untouched and relieve it of the bottleneck. No, I will leave even the bottleneck. Still shall it and the cross continue to cry, to lament in the autumn wind, and show that the Deep Ravine still has something of life surviving in it. Yes, as before, O cross, you shall wail to the world. But as for that "note of interrogation," a single sweep of my axe lays it low. This is because constantly it urges me to think, to decide upon something—whereas I have finished with both thoughts and decisions, and have no more questions to resolve, but am as are the harp, the candelabrum, and the hunchback. Similarly I hew the serpent apart. I have no use for portents now, but only for chaos. . . .

So, as I hack and hack, the oaken chips fly apace. But ~~would that they would~~ ^{with some} put out my eyes, leave me blind, and veil everything in darkness! Meanwhile some lizards watch me, and one with a yellow belly, a little thing like a piece of whipcord, ~~glides slowly from the path~~ ^{glides slowly from the path}. They are the ravine's dumb inhabitants. Frequently they and I hold unspoken

intercourse. Also grasshoppers leap upon me, and crawl amicably over my rags; whilst it is a real thrill of pleasure that seizes upon me when in a tuft of grass I discern a praying beetle, clad in rusty cassock, and perceive the little creature to be raising its tiny hand-paws towards, and seemingly addressing its ~~clever~~ little prayer to, the cross itself. Well, what else should that withered little monastic do? Yet does it not see that over the cross stands a bottle?

Oh, that only such creatures and objects as these, as the bushes and the rocks and their indwellers, had ever lived here! But the place has been tenanted also by other works of creation.

I see lying before me a soldier's tin canteen—green, rusted to the protective colour of its surroundings. I look through and beyond it and see life bathed in blood. The spectacle strikes me as a blow with the back of the hand, and for a moment the ravine wavers, swims, and forms over itself a sort of glass web.

For to think of the other creatures that have lived and howled in this ravine!

Three years ago it was the camping-place of gangs of half-naked sailors. ~~Bawling that~~ power must be seized, they trained a gun upon the neighbouring Tartar villages, instilled fear where there had been peace, guzzled looted liquor, devoured food from tins prised open with the points of their cutlasses, and cracked jars in two by pounding them with heavy stones. Hence one can still read "Shishmann" here and there amongst the mouldering débris which once contained pickles, jams and potted meats. That Shishmann met his end very suddenly. He did so by the wayside. All at once on a mountain road there was seen lying, spread-eagled in the dust, a manufacturer of preserves. His frock-coat was open, his linen shirt displayed, his pockets ripped out, and his jaws distended with the wrenching thence of a gold-mounted setting. And since then preserves have been absolutely unprocurable. The only thing in that line now to be encountered is the rusty medley of empty preserve-tins which, in ditch, in ravine, lies whistling in the wind. For it is here that the heavy-jowled, dull-eyed sailors broke open

bottles of port and muscat and alicante (oh, the number of glassfuls that there was for each mouth!), and, maddened with liquor, roasted sheep before great fires of wood, and tore thence the kidneys and the entrails exactly as their forefathers had done, and danced decked about with grenades and machine-gun belts, and roared out Cossack songs, and finally dispersed into the undergrowth to spend the night with wenches.

And all the while in Europe certain superfine personages, with a flair for political "progress," personages who live hedged about with the protection of their countries' laws, personages who can sit at sumptuous study tables without having the portraits of their beloved ones snatched thence or their written works sequestered, are reading with pleasurable thrills of "the greatest social experiment ever made." Well, my good friends, pray go on saying that "Russia's life is only being reshaped"; pray go on repeating the stock phrases which have fathered the wish, and at least may serve to reanimate your ease-ennervated hearts; pray go on rattling out such chatter-tags as "titanic outbreak of a people's soul," "life-renewal on an enormous scale," "elemental upheaval of a nation's forces," and "majestic aspirations of a proletarian giant conscious of his power," and all the rest of the hotchpotch of high-sounding catchwords sold for a few kopeks apiece by venal scribblers.

Yes, carried away by your feelings, clap your hands, send greetings to our taskmasters, accord them honourable interview, congratulate them and encourage them, and magnanimously overlook details and perfunctorily repeat that "he is not the only sinner who—" etc., and so, as men yourselves favoured of fortune, proclaim to all the world that what is being done here is in the natural order of things, and let your well-meaning speeches swell the hearts of Russia's tyrants and accord them a needed testimonial.

For you do not view things from a lofty vantage-ground, and therefore your purview is limited.

Nay, leave those comfortable studies of yours, and that grateful, reassuring light of reading-lamps, and those ranked

volumes the gilded binding of which blinds you to the realities of life, and come out here to see for yourselves. Here, on the spot, you will behold, not documents strewn with words, but live souls dripping with blood after being jettisoned as so much rubbish. And if really you look at and examine the picture you will learn that for masters we have men whose love of "plainness" at least does not prevent them from cultivating things once maintained by the Imperial régime and going in for palatial residences, and Rolls-Royce cars, and *récherché* wines, and luxurious settees, and silent-treaded carpets, and fine linen still bearing the Imperial crown, and crested china looted from aristocratic tables, since these things are, one and all, both in keeping with political "progress" and greatly to be preferred to the barren setting of a hand-to-mouth existence. And finally you will learn that it is no good weighing high sentiments against material amenities, or tradition against political "forwardness," and that the besotted slave can have dust thrown in his eyes with any sort of verbal jugglery, and that his ears can be bemused with the same, and that bayonets can furnish a support to the whole.

Yes, come hither, and see things for yourselves. But do not come if you are a personage of world-jingled name, for to such our masters accord *wagon-lits* lulling to slumber with the mere rhythm of their rocking, vehicles padded with the last-remaining rags of beggars; such find themselves installed in the mirrored, exclusive setting of a Grand Hotel in the Metropolis; such have their arrival unctuously announced in the "Special Intelligence" columns of journals printed by a tied press; such are pressed to drink from bottles still bearing the Imperial arms and to partake of stewed veal in milk, and of sturgeon, and of game from the Siberian forests, and of delicacies such as Russia's nameless myriads have never even dreamt of, but which for visitors are prepared by a master chef, and then to gaze through a window at a speciously alluring panorama. Well, look straight at that panorama not with shaded eyes. Otherwise may you, too, one day fall into the pit.

But, as a matter of fact, I feel sure that you will never

come here under an incognito, and penetrate to the heart of the matter. Only from a mountain-top is it a fine thing to watch a conflagration. Only from the shore is it a fine thing to watch an ocean storm. Given those conditions, the two spectacles are splendid.

I myself, however, am not so buried, so isolated, in this Deep Ravine of mine as not to find myself confronted with reality. Climb up the ravine a little way, and you will see the main road to Yalta, with beside it a hillock and two telegraph-poles. Those poles have, for a year past, been transmitting one message, and one message alone: which is the message of death. And beside them once there was shot an invalid officer-lad as all unsuspecting he was returning from the German front. Exhausted with the journey, and seized during sleep, he was dragged to that hillock, set up against one of the poles like a bottle and fired at for a prize. After which the competition ended, the competitors returned to their liquor guzzling, to their gorging of mutton, to their bawling of songs, and to their jungle dallies with wenches.

Above the oaken scrub and seacomb you will see, too, the wooden windlass and the red roof of a ruined farm. Yet not long ago that farm was a homestead all humming with youth and strength, and I well remember Krasudek, Polek, and the rest of its goodly brown cows with white faces which used to stand lazily, languidly blinking and cud-chewing in the sunshine until such time as the farm-women's strong fingers should set the milking pails a-ringing, even as I remember the glittering churns which a dark-painted rulley used to remove to the town with a merry evening clattering and splashing of their contents. But above all I remember the farm's two sturdy little children—the round-stomached three-year-old with features almost tanned black who never was without a lump of cake in his tiny fist, and frequently fled howling from the poultry, and the plump-cheeked, bare-legged little damsel who played with the calves. To this hour I can scent the farm's keen, acrid smell of sweat and of cowdung. Oh, the graciousness of abundance that it all meant—the sea of milk—the wealth bred of beneficent sunshine!

Now that sea is run dry. Now those cows have been driven off to the "National Abattoir," and the farm's stock and implements given to the winds of heaven. In short, the farm is *dead*. And still looters are rifling it, and it has in it only blood and desolation. Not long ago, at that derelict spot, one Grishka Ragulin, an ex-plasterer, an ex-sailor, an ex-robber of hen-roosts, an idle, envious fellow, a foul-mouthed brute, and the Commissar of Roads and Forests, forced his way into the room of a working-woman, and because she would not yield to his desires stabbed her to the heart with his bayonet. And next morning her children awoke to find her—and the bayonet. Upon that her fellow-women sang her requiem, and then crying the deed abroad demanded of the Revolutionary Tribunal that it should avenge the treatment meted out to a working-sister by arraigning and punishing the murderer. And to that demand the Tribunal replied with blows from a machine-gun belt, and the vile ex-robber of hen-roosts went forth to "commissar" as before.

Whence, wherever one turns one's steps, there is no escaping blood. It is everywhere, and almost might be springing from the very ground, and spurting red upon the vines, and dyeing the withered thickets upon the foothills! . . .

I chop and chop. Then I cry "Enough!" for my sack is full, and a sufficiency of twigs also is to hand. The only thing remaining to be done is to attach my leathern strap to the faggot, to drag the whole lot home, and to swell still further the wood-pile which is for ever my point of departure and my goal. By now the ravine is flooded throughout with sunshine and bearing the full heat of day. For a moment or two I will rest upon that stone beside the cross. . . . Dreamily the cicalas are chirruping. Dreamily warm is everything. . . .

GAMBLING WITH DEATH

"Good morning!"

With a violent start I feel, for an instant, as though I were falling over a precipice. Then I have been dozing? Yes, and the sun is high, and I have yet many things to see to—I have yet to gather some more vine-leaves, and to let out the poultry, and lastly to trudge all the way to a Tartar's in order to persuade him to buy an old shirt for five pounds of barley.

"You seem to have been asleep. Shall I help you with your load?"

I see standing beside the cross a man in rags, black-haired, sallow, slightly swollen of feature, unshaven of chin, unwashed; he is clad in a straw sun-hat with many holes, Tartar long-boots that allow the toe-nails to be seen, and a whitish calico shirt so torn as to reveal patches of yellow skin. He might almost be taken for a wharf loiterer.

Yet for some time past I have known him as a confrère, as a fellow-writer, as a literary aspirant. His name is Shishkin. He seats himself upon the stone beside me, and for a while we remain without speaking.

Somehow he always fills me with foreboding on his behalf. Always I fancy that I see the Inexorable standing and grinning behind him in preparation for seizing him by the throat and choking the life out of him. And already Fate has dealt tragically with his lot, used him shamelessly for sport, alternately starved and enriched his existence. For Fate can play the game it chooses. Always and everywhere something out of the way has befallen the man before things were finished, and therefore he always gives me the impression that something is about to befall him again, and fills me with depression and foreboding as to what that something may prove to be. As for his own chief sentiment with regard to life, it is—and

he never loses the idea—to wrest himself clear of his present existence, bury himself in a cave and give himself up to literature alone. Already he writes. Of that I am aware. I know that he does so wherever and in whatsoever fashion he can—amongst the crags, on the beach, or in some derelict vineyard, with the moonlight for candle, and old journals for paper, and the juice of dark-hued berries for ink—neither ink nor paper of the usual kind being procurable by hook or crook.

So, sitting hidden with me in the Deep Ravine, he returns to that same favourite scheme of his, and exclaims:

“How I should like to be able to go and live on a desert island! There, with dogfish and roots for food, I should have not a soul to trouble me. I could live like that for ever, and write uninterruptedly. For you cannot imagine what a swarm of subjects I have in my head! But most of all I should like to write a story about a certain friend of mine. I have known him from boyhood, and he is the best and noblest man in the world. As things stand, however, my surroundings stifle me.”

I know him to be talented. I know him to possess a fresh and sensitive soul. I know his short life already to have had included in it as much both of the strange and of the great as might have made up a hundred lives.

He began by being sent to serve as an infantry soldier in the Great War, and stationed at a particularly dangerous spot at the Front. Yes, naturally a kindly lad, naturally a lad considerate even of the feelings of a blade of grass, he found himself forced to stab men in the stomach with the blade of a bayonet! And, thrice taken prisoner during attacks, and thrice escaping, and thrice being recaptured, he meanwhile had to swim rivers, to roam forests, to hide himself in cornfields, to break into village stores for food, and even to snatch morsels out of village children's hands. Until, blundering by night upon an enemy outpost and wounded during the resultant fusilade, he was at last consigned to a prison in Germany itself, and in fact was lucky to escape being shot as a spy. There, to punish him for previous escapes, his captors, after lashing him to a stake with his hands behind

him, and scrubbing his naked body up and down against the grain of the wood until he fainted, sent him down a coal-mine, and set him to the task of loading trolleys. In that mine were prisoners half-dead with hunger, and even he, though his body was as swollen as though he had got dropsy, and he could scarcely move hand or foot, was made to work hard. Yet in that same mine Fate played another game with him—buried him and ten of his comrades as the result of an explosion! and though, as the only survivor (a trolley had happened to intervene between him and the explosion's full effect), he was dug out after a three days' entombment, it was six months before he could leave hospital and return to Russia as an exchanged prisoner. In Russia he began by making his way to a little town on the Lower Dnieper which already had fallen into Soviet hands, and, when peremptorily ordered to perform Soviet service, chose the task, as one congenial to his nature, of searching for and collecting destitute orphans. Then the Cossacks seized the town, and, surprised in the street with his official portfolio, and taken for a commissar, he was about to be dragged away and shot when Fate intervened once more by sending along the street an officer who recognised him as one of his former platoon leaders at the Front. Which truly was a miracle (not but that anything may, as a matter of fact, come about in real life). And so, eventually gaining the Crimea and rediscovering his family, he joined the Volunteer Army, but, on being declared physically unfit, undertook orderly duties at the Army's headquarters. Eventually, of course, there came the Evacuation, and as Shishkin elected not to accompany his comrades overseas, he was arrested by the Bolsheviks, stripped to his underclothing, and sent to Yalta to be shot. But in Yalta yet another miracle saved him, since, on showing his drunken executioner one of his manuscript stories and telling him the chequered history of his life, the fellow looked dully at him, exclaimed, "Damn it, *he* is not fit for a bullet!" seized him not unkindly by the shoulder with another growl of "*He* is not fit for a bullet," and thrust him away with "Off you go! To the devil with you!" Next, on once more

being called upon to serve the Soviet, Shishkin found himself charged with the task (and it was a distasteful one indeed for such a gentle, conscientious youth!) of commandeering for his superiors' use the bedsteads, tables, chairs, lamps, samovars and other belongings of country villas — often (as he afterwards told me) throwing wistful eyes at a certain "workers' club" which never was molested, and at a certain "political reading-room" whence never a book was taken away! Lastly, when requested to undertake functions of a still more responsible nature, and to become an actual commissar, he, feeling himself to be an honest worker, pleaded physical infirmity, and was sent about his business, save that until now he has been doing occasional work in the "People's Gardens" for a daily ration of half a pound of bread, and filling up the intervals with his writing. And now he exclaims:

"At last I am free! My next step shall be to leave that accursed little town for ever, and never see or hear of it again. In future the rocks shall be my abode, and the sunshine, the starlight and the sea my sole companions. In them alone is there peace. The spot which I have in mind for my abode lies about ten versts from here. You know it already. It is one of the caves under Kastel. Just beside it, you must remember, there stands a villa recently belonging to an uncle of mine. Last year he departed for Constantinople with the Volunteer Army, and now I and my family (which consists of my father, my mother, my sister, and a brother excused service because of consumption) have obtained the restoration of the villa's garden for our working task. We have sown Indian corn already, and next are going to restock the villa's yard and set up a cow. I was just coming to your place to say good-bye when I found you asleep."

As he sits beside myself and the cross, and keeps bending forward to peer at a notebook, he looks indescribably happy.

"The story," he goes on, "which I am writing just now is to be called 'The Joy of Life,' for at present I myself am experiencing so much of life's joy. No, of course I do not mean the life which actually we are living now, but the kindlier

existence which most frequently I picture as a kind of All-Blue Heaven."

He is so happy, in fact, that concrete thoughts are beyond him—he can only feel.

"Yes, and the precise spot for my labours is going to be the spot where chaos once ensued because of the earthquake. As you know, the earthquake left clefts behind it, and one of these, a cleft into which light percolates through chinks, I intend to convert into a study with a block of diorite for its table. There I shall be able to write splendidly!—Oh, and, do you know, we shall be sowing wheat next year. The only unfortunate point is that first there will be the winter to be got through, and that meanwhile we shall have to go on eating acorn-cakes made from this year's store. Such food, you know, does one little enough good."

Certainly hunger is written upon a face so sallow and rounded and puffy as almost to resemble a disk. But he is happy, all the same.

"Eventually I shall try to go abroad, for my heart aches to see Europe again. But, as things are, I shall stay here because of my family—I could not well leave my parents and sister at present. . . . I shall visit the town only as seldom as possible."

Thus we sit beside the cross—each of us thinking his own thoughts.

"Oh," suddenly he exclaims, "and have you heard the latest?"

"No. What is it? What more could happen?"

"Well, the men have escaped. They got away last night."

"Got away last night? The seven did?"

Great balls of light seem to float before my eyes.

"Yes—all except one of them. They are *there* now." And Shishkin points towards the mountains. "They did it, too, under the fellows' very noses."

Then the doctor must be a veritable prophet! And was his prophecy an anti-mortem premonition, or something that he had really heard? In the latter event, at least the something had not emanated from the Seven themselves.

"At about one o'clock it happened—and at two the men were to have been taken aboard the destroyer for Yalta! Some time ago we had heard that they were weakening with hunger, since latterly their rations had been reduced to a quarter of a pound of bread a day—and *you* know what the stuff is like at that—and also that they had confined with them a Frenchman for whose arrest no one knew the reason. Well, whatever the reason may have been, this Frenchman has just been examined about the affair, and a Communist acquaintance of mine passed on the details to me. I can tell you that there was indeed a commotion going on last night, for probably the authorities themselves will be arrested and made to find sureties. Well, here are the details. At first the Seven never thought of trying to escape, for they felt sure that they were only going to be held temporarily and then released: but when the authorities took to weakening them with hunger they concluded that though they might not, because of the 'armistice,' be going to be shot, at least they were going to be finished off with starvation. Also they somehow came to hear of a shooting at Simferopol of some other Greens who had surrendered (including their leader), even though, like themselves, they had at first been treated civilly and asked to undertake Soviet service. So eventually the Seven made up their minds for an attempt when the time should come for the cellar to be unlocked for their final removal—though at the moment they had no idea that last night had been appointed for that very same purpose. But subsequently they again changed their minds, for they feared lest further delay and starvation should render them too weak to make the attempt successful when the removal *should* be carried out: wherefore last night they resolved to take the initiative, and, as I have told you, got safely away exactly an hour before they were due to have been removed. Think, only think, of their luck! The first step in their plan of operations was to cast lots for the one who was to sacrifice himself by grappling with the sentry—for you must remember that none of them was armed; but the Frenchman declined to join in the lots-casting, so

sure did he feel that he was going to be released in any case, and the more so because neither he nor anyone else knew why he had been arrested at all—as likely as not it had been simply because of his French nationality. Well, as things have turned out, he is in Yalta now, and being made to answer for having known of the attempt without warning the authorities. The man who actually drew the lot was a Tartar (the party being made up, as you know, of Russians, Tartars and Chechentzes), and then all embraced one another and bid one another farewell. How fine that was—that men thus ostracised, and trapped, and surrounded with blood, should yet show one another brotherliness in the face of Fate!—Well, then they purposely raised a commotion in the cellar, so as to draw the sentry; and as soon as he entered the Tartar who had drawn the lot grasped his rifle-barrel and closed with him, whilst the rest made a dash, overthrew the outside sentry, and got away. And the night being pitch dark, they made straight for the mountains, but separated as they ran. Meanwhile the sentry whose rifle had been seized raised the alarm, killed the Tartar with his bayonet, and came upon the Frenchman. And now that Frenchman is answering for the affair. Fortunately the night was dark, the men knew every path, and there is not a horse left in the town. Yes, the Pass will have learnt all about the affair by now. And as the second-in-command up there is a very active young fellow, there will be no more mercy shown. Hurrah for the—well, for the *Six*!”

Gratefully I gaze towards the line of hot, misty mountains. Kindly crags, kindly forests, your own are with you again!

“And since then the Communists have been in a state of panic. The Pass stands closed, any motorist who doesn’t give the right signal is to be shot at sight, and the windings’ ranges have been taken. And even at night, now, the Bolsheviks won’t be able to rest in their beds, for the leaders’ quarters are well known, and raids upon them might be made at any moment. Yes, those fellows of the mountains keep up ‘links’ which are none the less effectual because they’re not readily discernible.”

So six out of the seven have won to life again! For the second time I throw the mountains, those grim, gracious protectors of the brave, a glance of gratitude. Long may their shielding of the valiant last! In the mountains' rocks and crags there is enshrined Truth, and God Himself watches over heroes, and ordains that stone may harbour men kindly, and immovable as stone, ready to stand by their fellows, men ready to share with others their last crust. Ever may success attend the struggle upon Truth's behalf, on behalf of the human soul! May that struggle still go on—by day, by night, on precipitous track, in eyrie of eagle, on main highway! . . . And how those men must have rejoiced to see the mountains' shining clefts again, and again to listen to their tense silences! . . . Truly a miracle has happened!

"Yes, how very interesting life can be!" my companion remarks with joyous conviction. "What escape from death's jaws may mean I know of my own experience. The joy of what I might call 'conscious resurrection' is unspeakable."

Now it is time to depart. My companion shoulders my heavy sackful of billets and then helps me to drag the faggot along. And he looks charged with joy as he walks by my side.

"To think that I am free at last!" he ejaculates. "What a day of wonders this is proving to be! Even the mountains seem to be gasping with relief and holding high festival, a sort of Sunday. So I must put it all into a story. The chances that come one's way!"

For myself, I feel that possibly I am looking upon this lad for the last time. None of us can foresee the future. Happy all over, though, is his boyish, ingenuous face. Nothing cares he that all the while there are being tied the knots from amongst which no man can discern the knot destined to preserve him and the knot destined to choke out his life.

As we reach my little home the peacock greets us with its mournful cry. Flashing green and blue and violet in the sunshine, it is standing perched on my entrance-gate.

"Oh, how beautiful everything is!" exclaims Shishkin.
"Beauty is everywhere if only one will look for it."

For the moment I forgot that not only I, but also Death, may be gazing upon the young fellow's sparkling eyes and meditating another throw. For Death has sported with him four times already. And the fifth time that assured, grinning Gamester may win.

THE VOICE UNDER THE BUNDLE

I SEAT myself at the door of my study and fall to gazing at the sea. Everywhere is silence, sultriness. Even a spider's thread suspended from the cedar hangs drooping without a quiver. Often it is for hours that I sit thus plunged in thought. But what are those ringings and boomings in my head? Are they sounds caused by hunger? In my head there are red clots as well—I can see them with my inward eye. Surely they must represent the welter of this life here?

But sometimes, also, there dawns in me a faint and far-off sound. And if upon that sound I fasten all my faculty of sensitiveness, soon there will begin in me a second sound, and then a third, and so on, and so on, until my somnolence is dissipated with a whole gamut of harmony, and I catch the playing of an orchestra. Whence the music of dreams has become known to me. Yet no—not of dreams, but rather of the "celestial voices" sometimes vouchsafed to ancient anchorites, of the tones of the heavenly instruments upon which the angels play.

And the mysterious harmony vibrates, vibrates. . . .

A shot re-echoes through the mountains. Ah! At once the music is broken off. What has happened? Is someone being hunted down? . . . Clots of blood float before me, the clots which haunt all this life. The only music now is the sound of their sobbing and wailing. . . .

My little white pullets are looking at me, gazing straight into my eyes. How wistful that gaze is!—Ah yes, I know. *Your* little heads too are humming, but the humming's faint note keeps escaping you, and you cannot distinguish its attendant harmonies. Yet why regard me like that? Have I a phantom standing behind me? Tiny friends, your mournful looks are in vain. Nor, for that matter, need we fear death, seeing that it is only on the other side of that change that

we shall find the true harmony. Little Pearl, do not you realise that you yourself are a whole orchestra, and a very wonderful one? True, it is a lowly orchestra; yet also it is an orchestra marvellous beyond expression. Merely take one of those diminutive little button-like eyes of yours. That eye may rank amongst the wonders of the world, seeing that its small lacquered pinpoint can reflect in motion the great sun, the immeasurable stars, the sea, the mountains (whether sombre or clear-cut or veiled with mist), the forests and the beasts of the forests, men watching lonely roads from rock hiding-places, and, last but not least, myself, a being whose brain is life's epitome. And inasmuch as that little eye will soon be closed in sleep, do you now envisage all things the more, that you may bear their image with you to the Unseen. And what a symphony even your feathers constitute! For the Almighty originally gave you life, even as He has given it to me, and to that foolish ant there. And only the Almighty can take it back again.

And what a wonderful orchestra that life once was, and how ineffable was the symphony which it played! That was because then Life itself, the Great Steward, conducted the orchestra. In those days even the rocks, building-stone of palaces and mansions, sang songs instead of wailing by the roadside with riven throat. In those days even iron chanted its lay as it spanned sea and mountain, or, in the form of milking-pails (the milk itself singing its glorious ditty), made music amongst sated, full-fed kine. In those days even gardens hymned their reclamation from the desert, smiled with their myriad delightful smiles. In those days even vineyards sang as they stored up vouchsafed rains for a future revel upon soil and sunshine. In those days even the drowsy oaks sang as they formed pot-bellied boles for future orchestral tympani and double-basses and the thunderous kettledrum. In those days even the golden wheat sang with a ringing note as in showers it was sprayed into iron holds of ships—sang with a note as sweet as that of its grain's parent fields. In those days even the wind and the rustling grass and the faint melodies of the mountains all contributed their notes to the

universal orchestra. Aye, and in those days even the slow-moving old beggar-man of the highway, though compounded into a human fragment merely of earth and sunshine, sang quaveringly a song to hearten his journey upon the unknown road, until all doors flew open to him and, human poverty's all-connecting link as his only introduction, he could sleep as soundly as under his own roof. All this was because in those days life ever had walking through it One whose spirit of loving-kindness sowed hearts with spiritual wisdom.

But is it only a dream that comes upon me at such times? May not that ravishing orchestra be sounding in actuality? Ah, I *know* that my "dream" is more than a dream. I *know* that that of which I have been speaking did once have an existence.

For in past days I myself have walked the misty roads of the North, followed the South's gleaming tracks, and whilst doing so talked with my fellows in confidence, and in confidence received their replies. And ever with us walked Christ, unseen. And to me those stranger-folk represented my field. And, as distant singing at unknown homesteads lured me onward, the footsteps of one about to meet me even on the loneliest road were to me only as the footsteps of a life comrade, and I felt no fear of them. For a night's lodging always I had the open countryside. For company always I had the kindness of my native speech. For in those days Life, the Wise Steward, was still director of this Russian land.

But Life's splendid orchestra now lies in confusion. The instruments of the orchestra have been flung hither and thither—the string and the brass broken. And instead there reign—pandemonium and uproar. Nowadays, on meeting strangers, you must kneel down upon the road and hold up your hands, if you would not have those strangers cut off your hands, or even your head—if you would not have them wrench the tongue from your throat and the heart from your breast. So that what sometimes causes that discordant din in my brain is the sound of the orchestra's dying. . . .

On the other side of my hedge I hear something give a rustle and a hiss as though a snake were approaching the

garden. I peer through one of the clumps of briers, and see creeping towards me a great bundle of freshly cut felling-tips amongst kindling and twigs. The bundle moves along as though it were trailing hisses on the road behind it. And as it approaches still nearer I sight bent beneath it, and half-crushed with its weight, a human being. The human being halts—breathes: and then I hear from beneath the bundle the greeting "Good day," and catch a glimpse, through the ragged brier clump, of a pair of hairy, scratch-covered shanks that are trembling with exhaustion.

"Good day," is my reply. "Pray come in and rest, and regain your breath."

"No, no, if you please, for if I did I might be unable to lift this load again."

It is Drozd the postman or, rather the ex-postman, seeing that in these days it would puzzle anyone to know what letters could arrive, or whence they could come.

True, when our enslavers first alighted here they announced that "we are going to maintain communication with all the world," whilst, in particular, a drunken sot of a Pavliak, one of the brand-new commissars, boasted that "we are going to establish connection with France and everywhere else, so that anyone may send a letter anywhere, and show every country that we can do something more than catch flies." Yet so little was Pavliak able to cope with the grandeur of his new position that eventually he leapt from a window and fractured his skull, and so broke off the "communications." And as for the red-headed ex-porter who succeeded him, he merely sits behind his official grating and bawls:

"Wha-a-at? There is no such thing as 'abroad' now. We and all other countries are one. You say that you get no letters? Wait a bit, then. You have been spoilt."

So Drozd has laid his postbag aside, and occupies himself with—well, with "domestic affairs."

He passes my place every day, bearing with him an axe and a piece of rope, and is bound for the high-road and one or another spot where fuel may be gathered against the winter. Before dawn, sometimes, his laboured footsteps begin to make

themselves heard. And when he has chopped sufficient sticks and kindling he makes the whole into a bundle, shoulders it, and starts upon the return journey — crawling and hissing across the undulant ridges like a strange monster, and taking uphill and downhill as they come. It is afternoon when he passes my place again; and then he halts for a few moments to recover his breath, and calls out to me.

A just man amongst the froward he is. The neighbouring town does still harbour a few such, and so, for that matter, does every quarter of this dying Russia. Living with him are his wife, his three-year-old little girl, and his boy of one. Once he used to think of giving each of his children a "foreign" (all-round) education, so that the daughter might go into "the dental profession" and the son into "the engineering"; but now he has to put forth his best efforts even to keep the children alive.

And there was a time when he would say proudly as he delivered a letter at a boarding-house, "My work is educated work," or when he would cry jovially, "These are for Gospodin Petrov. Yes, *two* letters! To think that *anyone* should write to an agri-cult-ural gentleman!"

But as the course of life changed his mien grew graver, and he took to saying such things as:

"For 'Citizeness Raneiskaia.' Last year known as Madame Raness. For 'Comrade' Okopalov, and pray give him my Soc-i-al-istic compliments."

And now his work has come to an end altogether.

He is one who from the first cherished a profound veneration for European politics and ways of life.

"For Gospodin Professor Kolomentzev. From *London*. It is a treat to hold it in one's hands. For oh, the paper that they make there! And can it, perhaps, be from Lloyd George himself? At all events that is a very firm handwriting."

For some reason or another he always looked upon Lloyd George as a man of mark.

"*What* a politician!" he would cry. "True, he *does* seem to be leading up to Socialism, but see how cleverly he does it! Clearly he believes politics to mean doing things, and

not merely standing with one's mouth open. Oh, a regular gen-i-us!"

And then Drozd got some far-off glimpses of the war, and, halting beside my fence, would cry distractedly:

"This altogether beats me. To think that Europe should have made such progress in education only for that barbarism now to be flaunting itself there! Why, they have gone and sunk *another* civilian passenger-ship! It is unendurable, a regular wild-beasting of the instincts! The thing to do is to call upon every civilised human being to frame and present a cult-ur-al protest, or I do not know *what* will happen. Such things don't bear even thinking of."

Yes, he began to go his rounds plunged in thought, as though filled full of grief. And once, when at dinner, he became so fired with his burning thoughts that he pushed aside his *borsh*,¹ fixed his pensive blue eyes, the visionary eyes so often met with in Little Russia, upon his wife, twisted his face with its square, high-cheekboned features into an expression of anguish, and sat brandishing aloft his spoon.

"What is it?" his wife exclaimed. "Surely I did not forget the salt?"

"No!" rapped out Drozd deliberately as his spoon continued to send bits of *borsh* flying all over the tablecloth. "Merely I am wondering how human beings can so bring themselves to offend against principle, culture and morality. O Europe, Europe—whither? Why, over a precipice! Yes, all will soon be ended."

"Go on with your eating, though, Gerasim, or your *borsh* will get cold. You have got Europe on the brain. But what in particular is the matter now? Haven't they sent you your money?"

"Money? What do *you* know of politics? Ah, Prokofii was right when he told me that the terrible times of the Apocalypse of Saint John the Divine are returning, with their black and white horses of the big manes, and their riders of fire and iron—yes, of *iron*!"

"Oh, Prikofii gets things into his head which simply make

¹ A soup of bacon and beetroot.

him want to play the fool with everyone. Why, his wife Tania has just told me that he has taken to sleeping on the roof at night, and making the children do the same, and that he's given up his cobbling work because miracles are expected!"

"Miracles?" was Drozd's testy retort. "Well, why should a miracle *not* happen now? Indeed, with culture overthrown like this, miracles are what we need, and what there'll be. Aye, and perhaps a whole Rev-el-a-tion. And whence will the Revelation come? It will come of this bloodshed, for such bloodshed is bound to breed miracles. And if Prokofii scents those miracles in advance, naturally he says, he says—well, what does he say? 'No longer must I take money for the labours of my hands, since money has blood in it. Hence, if I mend your shoes for you, do you give me for doing so only a morsel of bread rendered in the spirit.' Yes, and the spiritual law *ought* to be kept like that, for that alone is true culture. But Lloyd George——"

"The next thing will be that Prokofii's children will be finding themselves left orphans."

"Well, and aren't there plenty of good people ready to adopt orphans, and love them? But why talk so. Our need of the day is in-ward mor-al-i-ty. For what do men live by? They live by that of which Count Leo Tolstoi has spoken—and he is one whom all Europe reverences as a genius. And here is this twentieth century of ours seeing the instincts of the beasts ruling the roost! A-a-ah!"

Drozd always had a special weakness for the words "progress" and "culture," and also for the word "referendum." All educated folk were to him objects of respect, and he dubbed himself a "Progressive," and drew no distinctions between parties, but advocated solely "culture." So when the Bolsheviks alighted here, and began their arrests "on information received," they of course incarcerated the eminently pacific Drozd. An "enemy of the people" he was. The men who did this were the first-arrived gang of Bolsheviks, a mob of undisciplined sailors commanded by a young student from the Yalta Gymnasium. And, lodging Drozd and a crippled notary and Ivan Mikhailitch (the

professor who had had a "pension" of a pound of bread a month allotted him) in a stable, they kept the three prisoners for two days and nights in hourly expectation of being shot. Said Drozd at last to these new "masters":

"After all, what have I done? Never have I taken any part in politics. The only thing that I have ever advocated has been culture. And it is your duty, too, to advocate culture and morality. In fact, it is your *bounden* duty if light is ever to reach 'them who sit in darkness.' "

Then other sailors thrust their heads into the stable.

"Hullo, my lords and generals!" one of the new-comers cried. "Don't forget that to-night you'll be feeding the fishes with a bit of your lordly flesh."

Replied Ivan Mikhailitch:

"Very well, my brethren. And inasmuch as only the Lord God has power to give life and death, you will be acting as His instruments. Remember that, and humble yourselves, and the more so in that these things may have been ordained expressly for your instruction, and that later you may repent. To myself it is all one. If *we* are generals, *you*, my very stupid friends"—he nodded at the fellows—"are men who, though not knowing your right hands from your left, have dared to blunder into politics! Blockheads that you are, your job is to sail ships, to fight the Germans, and to defend Russia; whereas, instead of doing that, you are guzzling looted liquor and taking what doesn't belong to you. In any case, too, why kill off a decent working-man like our postman Drozd—a father with young children, a worker with horn on his hands? Oh, you rabble! Never was the sign of the cross made over *you*!"

"And don't *you* answer back, you old scoundrel! Your talk will do better for the fishes, you old stick of gentility! You're the sort to put it on on Sundays, and wash it off on Mondays."

Ivan Mikhailitch's bony fist shot out. Never has he been able to brook a direct insult. Through the doorway he grabbed the sailor by the collar, until the fellow, absolutely flabbergasted at such temerity, could only roar:

"Let go, damn you, or you'll tear it! Are you mad, you old fool?"

"You old *what*, do you say? I am a Vologdian the same as yourself, and, what you're *not*, an Orthodox Christian."

"Are you *really* a Vologdian?" And in a trice the sailor's sun-blackened, saucepan-wide face became wider than ever, and he grinned with all his teeth.

"Why not? Don't you know your own dialect? Don't you know how they quiz us with 'A copper ladle has fallen down. That may be vexing, but it's no great matter'?"¹

"Enough playing about! You're the real thing, old cock—one of our own Vologdians." And the now radiant sailor slapped Ivan Mikhailitch upon the shoulder. "*You're* all right; you're one of ourselves. But wait a bit. Which canton do you come from?"

"Now, then! 'Wait a bit,' indeed? Ah, well! I come from the canton of Ust-Sysol."

"And so do I! Yes, I belong to Ust-Sysol, the very same canton as yourself."

"Once I tilled the land there. Once I went to school there. And though I am a professor now, and have written books, I shall not be afraid to make a hole in the land again. But why arrest and drown a man like Drozd?"

"Why-y-y? Well, as a concession, he shall be shot."

"Gudgeons! You ought to have your eyes soaped for you!"

"Come, come, old buffer! Less of your talk. And how is it that *you* are not afraid?"

"I am a Vologdian, I say again. Besides, why should I, in any case, be afraid, seeing that already one of my legs is in the grave? Rather do *you*, you muttonheads, be afraid—afraid because you have chosen a weanling babe to command you in your killing of old men. Why, that lad ought to have his ears pulled! I myself had to pull him up twice in his dictation not long ago, and if, you dirty-nosed fools, you were to take and strip him of his breeches, and look at him, you would see that the stripes haven't healed even yet."

¹ This Russian tag forms a triple-rhymed couplet, and is couched in a dialect substituting n's for d's.

Upon this the notary thought well to check the speaker, and on some more sailors arriving, it befell that though the gymnasium student talked and talked, with many appeals to his hearers' "revolutionary consciousness" and to their "party discipline," it was the Vologdian sailor that eventually carried the day, and dismissed the three prisoners with a "Be off with you to Hell!"

Later other Bolsheviks reached Yalta. These were men of pure Russian blood,¹ and maddened with drink they ran amok, and sang and howled and felled everyone whom they met with showers of frenzied blows. This because they were men whom at any moment an unexpected turn arising from some such trifle as a suggestive word could render oblivious of slogans, labels and programmes, and lead insatiably to call for blood. And being thus sheer beasts, they could hack asunder a living man—but they could not quietly, in business-like fashion, hang him. For such a deed as that they had not the necessary self-possession or "class morale." A deed of the sort required to be done by true "artists in blood-letting." It required to be done by members of some race which hails from—well, which does not hail from Vologda.

Thus was the innocent Drozd reprieved from death. But ever since then he has held his peace and ceased to discourse of "progress" and "culture," in that he has "drunken of the waters." No, now he does not even let himself go upon the weather. No longer, either, does he shout over a flourished newspaper, "Pray read this remarkable telegram about a shark being caught!" or "about a German who has invented a new yeast!" or "about another planet which has been discovered, and found to be a star, a comet, of the fifth dimension, of the fifth di-men-si-on!"

During the war Verdun particularly excited him, and he could not sleep for thinking of the place. Constantly he would refer to the map, and on one occasion came running to me with a newspaper, and crying:

"The storm attack, the *seventeenth* storm attack, has been beaten back again! Such was the French soldiers' heroic

¹ That is to say, not of Jewish or other alien blood.

spirit that they drove the Germans right back to their original starting-point!"

And now Verdun and displays of French valour have become things of the past. And now Drozd has ceased to talk at all. . . .

As Drozd approaches me beneath his crushing burden of faggots blood is oozing from the criss-crossed scratches on his legs below his tattered, rolled-up trousers. Then he stands peering at me with a tanned, emaciated, pained, perspiring face that truly might be the face of a martyr.

"My phys-i-cal ar-tic-u-la-tion is weak now," he whispers cautiously. "That is because we can get no food to speak of—I never see either the yolk or the white of an egg, nor yet the least morsel of fat. And once I unloaded a twenty-five-pood truckload without being out of breath! A truckload of poultry it was. Yes, and at this very moment a little child is dying in the villa down there. A drop or two of chicken-broth and that child might have a chance of life again. Well, chickens hereabouts are, so to speak, at a discount. We ourselves killed our last fowl to-day. It had been lying hidden under a tub, of course—lying there, so to speak, in state. You see"—Drozd here sinks his voice to the barest whisper—"our folk-psychology is deteriorating. Do not you think the same? I myself hail from Ekaterinoslav originally, and still have a nephew there. Well, not long ago he wrote to me: 'I had stored up five poods of grain (after, oh, such a getting!) when a rascal stole the lot.' So in these days storing merely means losing. As for bartering, even such things as a lipped drinking-glass, or a good saucepan, have to go for nothing, for no one has anything to buy them with. Take my library. It weighed five poods when I had it, and now it is gone—all that culture is gone!"

Ever, as Drozd whispers, his eyes, with their set expression of terror, keep glancing about him.

"Ah, things are indeed bad, Drozd!"

"Aye! And, above all, civilisation is approaching a crisis. And so is our Intelligentsia." Again, hissing beneath his faggots, he glances nervously about him. "Gospodin Nekrasov

was quite right when he said, 'O people of Russia, you are scourging wisdom and virtue and antiquity—but one day they will thank you.' For now there are Russian folk who can even rob an old woman! In fact, our every position is giving way—culture, morality, and everything else. Below our place there is living an old lady by name Natalia Nikiforovna. Probably you know her, for she used to keep a home for orphans of Tikhonirov's school and national schoolteachers. Yet, now that she is old, the authorities won't let her have even a morsel of bread! So not long ago a certain educated gentleman seemed to take compassion upon her. He said, 'Oh, I'll get you something. It is outrageous that an old lady like you should perish. Surely chaos has come!' And with that he ran to the Board's doctors, and upbraided them, saying, 'I know a good old woman who is starving. I won't leave you until you have put her upon the list.' And upon the list they put her. Then the gentleman raked together some scraps, and again presented himself before her with a shout of 'I've got you something! Do you pray to God for me.' And she burst into tears, for it was as though one of God's saints had appeared! Aye, he handed her a quarter of a pound of sugar, and a pound (a small pound) of rice-mixed flour. That was a *fourth* of her ration, the rest he went and cooked for himself! And when people began to hear of it he ran to her again, and said, 'A mistake has been made, but of course I will stand by you as before. Only see that I am not compromised, for folk are coming to know of the mistake, and you might be thrown into a cellar for illegal receiving, and the doctors as well.' But the old lady only said through her tears, 'Leave me! I cannot abide reptiles.' Yet he is a man with a fur-lined coat to his back, and gold studs, and a watch!—Ah, well! Now I will continue my way downhill."

"Oh, but have you heard the latest? Last night the seven escaped."

The bundle stops and quivers. The peak of it dips for a moment.

"Wha-a-at? The—the—? Oh, it *can't* be!"

And, saying no more for the moment, though gazing at me

with a look of transport, he draws a long breath, and once more glances about him. No one is in sight. There is no one to overhear us.

"God help us, but one needs to be careful," he rustles, whispers, as he straightens the peak of his bundle. "And is it really true?—Ah, well! I *must* go now."

But he has not crept forward two paces before, halting again, and turning his face towards the sea, he whispers:

"There is something else that I should like to ask you. What is it? Oh, it is about Lloyd George."

"What do you want to know about him?"

Drozd bends forward under the heavy load, thrusts out a brown head like a tortoise, and peers before him with bloodshot, weariness-inverted eyes—truly a painful spectacle to behold. A silence ensues. Then slowly, very slowly, and with a rustle, the bundle turns away its peak from the sea. It turns as though it too has been thinking, and its bearer, taking a step forward, says in an almost inaudible whisper:

"Does—does he really *exist*?"

"He belongs to another world than our own, Drozd. He belongs to a world which, for us, is merely the world that *has* been."

"He's not dead, then?"

"Oh no! Very much alive, and as likely as not engaged in consuming steaks and porter."

"'Po-o-orter'?" re-echoes the bewildered Drozd.

It would seem as though the word conveyed to him a sinister impression.

"Yes, porter. See here, Drozd. Every nation has its protagonists, and those protagonists have learnt to speak and act so as to be able at one and the same time to prate of humanity and lofty aims and to get hold of any barrels of porter that are going for their own people. Do you understand me?"

"Ye-es," Drozd rustles back at me as he leans against my brier-fence with a face almost of agony. And to that presently he adds in his frightened whisper:

"Oh, we have been *fools*! In 1914, except for us, the Germans would have swallowed them up. See how they are repaying it!"

"Beefsteaks and porter *they* have: and *we* have——! Yet, my dear Drozd, it is our own fault that no one wants us."

Drozd, agitated beyond words, and twisting his neck from side to side, whispers:

"Yet to think of the culture that Europe has spread about her! For she *did* do that, didn't she, and Lloyd George the same? Why, I have read, and even wept over, every one of his speeches. And now we stand ruined, utterly ruined!—Herzen was right when he wrote, 'One day Russia will fall, and everything with her.' Right, too, is Prokofii's talk about a 'Revelation born of blood.'"

And he departs finally—a saint of light in a graveyard.

A saint? Yes, verily a saint. Saints still are left in this dying corner, in this countryside beside a slumbrous sea. And those saints are known to me as men and women who, though they be few, ah, few indeed, will never succumb to temptation, never touch the thread designed to land the writhing victim in the snare. For they have in them the life-giving spirit and cannot fall crushed under the all-grinding millstone. Are they, then, dead souls? No, they are souls very much alive, for all that I know that soon they will have passed hence.

And what of the other Russia, of the Russia where almond orchards may be blooming still, and the sea glittering, and the sun laughing? Is that Russia, too, a riotous graveyard, or is it still in existence at all?

I turn and glance towards the north, towards blue iridescent Chatyr Dag. Surely over there there is still the Russia of apple orchards and green fields? Oh, to be there again, to be far, oh far, from the Crimea's crumbling towns and ruined villages, to be able to journey to where there must be meadows dew-spread by night, and diffusing far and wide ineffable freshness of scent! Once, in the Crimea, we were promised all that the heart could desire. Ah, that was

once. *Now*——! . . . See those dark masses in the meadows! Hayricks can they be? Yes, they are hayricks, mellowing hayricks, the mowage's lusty output. Then, to leave the road, and to plunge into the hay, and to let the night-enveloped fields once more bring me peacefulness of slumber and rooks' cawings awaken me at dawn!

ON A LONELY ROAD

SEPTEMBER is passing, the autumnal equinoctial gales have died down, the heat is less, the weather has softened and turned drier, and the air has a rarified, transparent look. Moreover, everything has come to sound with a more resonant and clear-cut note, and the ridges' arid slopes to look warm and polished where the grasshoppers leap in little showers of grey, and wind-flattened leaves of "field roller" rustle, and cicadas sing their daily and nightly song.

Kastel is changing its colour with the rest. The decaying vineyards on its nearer foothills are breaking out into more and more patches of russet and brown. So also are the foothills' stretches of seacomb and scrub-oak. Every morning I perceive those patches to have crept a little higher and an increased amount of grey rock to be peering from the thinning, withering thickets. And meanwhile Kastel's fellows are, like itself, exhaling a smell robustly sweet and warm, a smell like that of wine-must, a smell of lichen-covered boulders. As one drinks in that smell at dawn one might almost have opened a bottle of champagne, so exhilarating is its scented bouquet.

Only the stark placard face of Kush-Kai undergoes no change, but as always is being inscribed with entries by an unseen hand, and gathering to itself and noting all that takes place. Indeed, involuntarily, as one contemplates that face's clear expanse of stone, one thinks of a desert. And around it there is only stillness, even though I know well that its every cleft, its every ruined vineyard, its every ruined vineyard hut, has squeezed and huddled into it human beings glad to crawl into those or any other crannies for concealment and scarce venturing to draw breath. Yes, not a sound is to be heard. The mountain's people utter not a cry, not a wail as they watch autumn perform its work of dismantling.

I, of my own knowledge, know the silence around that spot.

For not long ago I was walking in that direction, threading a track at the edge of the deserted cliff. And why was I doing that? For no more reason than that a blade of grass leans as the wind may bend it. Here and there white villas gaped at me. Upon the clay soil were strewn fir-cones—articles still free for the wayfarer to take. In the wild mint bees, the “reason-less” little creatures, were humming as they garnered winter stores. Spiders were veiling ant-heaps with gossamer as though those ant-heaps needed shading from the sunshine, and then quivering in crannies like tradesmen awaiting a tardy customer in the cool of their shops. And I noted these things the more because my every sense happened to be peculiarly keen and alert, and I was feeling as though I could converse even with the rocks, with the track, with the track’s loneliness. Well, sometimes a track has much, very much to tell me; and the fact sometimes leaves me wondering whether it and I may not be coming to be one, and we two again to be one with all things, and to have all boundaries opened to our vision.

Then at last I halted near the Black Rocks, which are a sea-perforated portion of the cliffs near there, and for a while looked for a chance crab amongst the stones, but saw no crab come into sight. For that matter, had I any real need of a crab? As things stand *now*, could it have told me anything? True, there was a time when crabs addressed me, but that was very, very long ago, in the days when I read wonder-tales and believed that dogfish could utter the most ravishing prophecies, and pebbles at a crossroads tell me my fortune, and bullrushes sing around tombs. So long ago are those days that memory cannot recall them.

Seating myself upon a rock, I let the water lap my feet. An old Tartar was climbing the cliff above me and industriously plucking dried grass for some purpose or another.

“Seliam-Alekoum!” I cried.

“Alekou-oum!” he wheezed back with a wave of his hand, a gesture which seemed to imply, “Nowadays even the greeting ‘Alekoum!’ is out of date.”

Then I continued my way, for now I had a mind to discover a certain ruined Tartar vineyard in connection with an old shirt that I had got thrust under the fir-cones in my sack and kept fingering. At least the Tartar owner of the vineyard might give me a few dried-up old peas in exchange for the garment. But I could not find the vineyard. Then I tried probing the shoots of a blighted cranberry-bush, but they too proved vain. Nor was there a single human being in sight. —Stay, though! Some human beings *were* in sight, in the shape of three children.

Yes, two girls and a boy there were, and the eldest child, a girl of about twelve, was contemplating me curiously with a pair of tired, sunken, blue-ringed eyes. I seated myself, and the two younger children unfolded a duster for my inspection. In it were—what? Some well-gnawed mutton-bones, a lump of ewe cheese, and a Tartar *churek* or flat cake.

"Yes, Munika. Let him have some," the eldest girl said, indicating me with a nod. Then, with a glance of her hazel eyes, she played the hostess by offering me the duster.

What an unexpected feast! That duster, too, was as good as a tablecloth! It seemed like a fairy-story that on that lonely road I should have fallen in with such sumptuous fare as mutton-bones.

"Eat away," I said. "Do not be afraid. For my part, I do not want any."

All three stared at me, but especially the boy, a youngster of about seven. He was so thin that, standing there open-mouthed, he looked like a young jackdaw. Yet, wasted though the children were, their faces were still childish and pleasant, and even attractive of expression. Particularly was this the case with the eldest, whose grave, firmly compressed, slightly drooping lips also gave abundant evidence of character. But why the suddenly proffered banquet? And why those multi-hued ribands on the eldest girl—ribands in her dark masses of hair, twisted behind her ears, pinned to her shoulders and bosom, all aflame with colour, leading her periodically to look at herself as though saying, "Isn't this splendid?" and festooned about her old blue, tattered, gossamer-thin blouse?

"Why those ribands?" I asked. "Is it a festival?"

Her reply, with a roguish smile, was:

"No. I was given them by some Tartars who dressed me up."

"Some Tartars?" I felt puzzled.

"Yes. And they gave us a feast as well, and let us spend the night in their hut. Oh, we did so enjoy ourselves! First they gave us mutton and wine, and then we went to sleep, and then they gave us these things to take home with us."

"But Tartars never drink wine?"

"Well, these did." There followed a shrug of a small shoulder and a smile in the sea's direction. "And so did we. And they told us to come again. You know, they have such a nice hut, and are so comfortable in it with their sheep and a dog! And after we had had supper and some real *katyk* one of them played to us on a *zurna*. Yes, *zurna* is the name."

Then she told her story in detail. "We live just below 'The Lindens,'" she said. "Glaskov is our name. And you live above us, don't you, and own the peacock? Oh, I *thought* I knew you. How I should like to have some of that peacock's feathers!—Well, yesterday papa was arrested for killing Koriak's cow, and—" Suddenly she glanced at me, and checked herself. Then, coming to some decision or another, she went on: "Of course, no one knows who really killed Koriak's Riabka, and in any case we are nearly starving, and Misha and Kolyuk—our two eldest brothers, you know—have run away (though don't tell anyone this) to the mountains, and, as Koriak is a Communist, he has informed against them, but we are going to pay him back for it, and also for beating our papa. Yes, for one thing we're going to tell our Tartar friends, as Koriak often goes through the Pass, and Kolyuk, too, will give his mates the word." Her lips fairly quivered with childish viciousness as she spat out her denunciation.

"And," cried the little jackdaw with a flourish of his fist, "we too mean to kill that Koriak—to kill him with a big stone, for he is a regular beast!"

"Not long ago he 'tole some boxes of money," the younger

girl added. "He is dust a boodgwar. Mammy says that he is."

"Be quiet, you little fool!" said the elder girl. "However, it's certain that Koriak is at the bottom of the trouble, and yesterday, with papa gone, we found ourselves with nothing at all to eat, so mamma sent us out to gather some blackberries, or anything else that we could find, and told us to search for them right up in the mountains. But we found the mountains all burnt up, and not even any beech-nuts on them. Do you know, I do so like beech-nuts!—though if one eats too many of them when they're fat and ripe they make one feel sick. And then we walked and walked through the woods, and saw nothing but things that were withered, even though we nearly reached Kush-Kai and Yalta, and passed, oh, such a lot of bones!"

"Yes, we saw bones as long as this," the jackdaw affirmed, pointing to his shoulder.

"And we found, when it began to grow dark, that we still had all the forest to return through, and were hungry from wandering about because we had had nothing but berries since morning. And at last we could scarcely walk. And then Munika began to cry, and to say that she couldn't go any farther, and then Stepushka did the same. So what was to be done? Suddenly a dog, a great big sheep-dog, met us, and oh, how we screamed! But the next thing was that two young Tartars met us as well, and as I know how to treat such men, I told them all about it, and they led us away to their hut. Nice young men they were, and they have a wood-yard of their own and a lot of sheep. Yes, and one of them kissed me—not out of rudeness, you know, but because he liked me, and wanted me to be his sweetheart, the impudent young lad!" Another smile and toss of the head followed. "And they fed us till we could eat no more, and then one of them went away for a time and came back with some wine and the *zurna* and a lot of ribands, for their village was close by, and the village's *starshina* is their father, and a rich father at that, with over a thousand sheep, though sheep are so scarce nowadays. At last, though, we became drowsy, and fell

asleep, and when I awoke this morning the men were laughing at me because, whilst I had been asleep, they had dressed me out with these ribands like one of their own Tartar brides. They had done so because they had been so very, very sorry for us. Then we left, and they gave us these things to take to mamma, and said that we must come again. They *are* such nice-looking young men!"

And she smiled again as she looked at the finery on her tattered blouse.

"You must remember that they are not at all like our own ruffians, like the brutes who misbehaved themselves to Pashka when her mother sent to the Military Offices for some bread. Pashka is a girl living in the villa next below us, and ever since she has been—well, she has been different from what she used to be, and has taken to going regularly to the offices, though she is only a year older than I am. Yes, she does it although her mother keeps beating her, and saying, 'Don't you go there again, or it'll be the worse for you.' She just cries, and says, 'I *will* go! I *will* go!' and is as obstinate as can be. Perhaps she hopes that if she goes there she'll not need to be hungry any more, and anyway she's always smartly dressed now. *Our* two Tartars, though, were polite. I'd marry one of them if I could." This was said firmly and with a stamp of the foot. "What do differences of religion matter?"

When this child, satisfied because she had received one day's full feeding and become a Tartar's "betrothed," had told her story, I stood wondering whether I ought not to warn her against going to the hut again. In the end I said nothing—I just resumed my journey.

My own destination now was a Tartar residence where I hoped to inveigle the elderly proprietor into buying my shirt. The road was at once empty and not empty, seeing that relics of human life marked its length throughout. Presently I reached one such relic in particular, in the shape of a roadside drinking-cellar whither once we had been used to resort for wine.

Beside the door, half-buried in the long russet grass, were

a rusty old bicycle and a brown empty barrel that was shedding its hoops. On the barrel a black cat was shivering in a vain attempt to warm its skeleton of a body. But the cicadas were chirruping in the sleepy, vacant prospect, nor was the scene wholly without marks of present-day human life—the cellar door's rusty lock had red seals upon it, as a sign that the place still contained some wine and that the wine was destined for somebody.

Moreover, there was a man sitting under a wayside clump of birch-trees, a fellow with slits of eyes, a red beard and ragged clothes. Fitting a wrapper to one of his legs, he shouted with a pat of the hand upon the pine-needles by his side:

"Pray sit down. Everything is free now."

On hearing his croaking, stuttering accents, I remembered him as Fedor Liagun, a man who officiated as watchman on a ruined estate farther along the road.

"You see," he went on, "we have put most of the masters to bed, and made the place free for workers to do as they like without anyone stopping them."

Next he tried my sack with his fingers.

"Pine-cones, eh? Well, they heat samovars, but the mischief is that we can't rise to tea. Gospodin Golubev himself, my master, has just lost his last five pounds of it. Yet what a professor he used to be! Not but that he still hasn't a bad sort of a place—forty *desiatini* of meadow and vineyard, and a bit of capital besides."

"Then at least *one* master is still alive?"

Liagun smiled at this. And all his red beard seemed to join in the smile and to make the wrinkles and freckles on his lean, cruel face stand out more than ever.

"Yes, he's alive and, though nearly ninety, going to live a good while yet if I can manage it. You see, his place is just coining money for me. True, the first lot of sailors, the lot from Sevastopol, shook him up a bit, and shook up his old woman until she had to take to her grave (she was stark naked by the time she reached it). But even that didn't trouble him for long, seeing that for one thing he's blind,

and for another thing he's tough. Then there came along your own people, the Volunteers, and he fell to work again upon his writing of books of instruction about man and man's inside (not that one ever sees him at it, though, or even grinding at his typewriter—as one passes by his window one just hears a click-click-clicking like a steam-engine, and knows that he's turning out his usual scientific stuff). Oh, I've had more than one good deal with him. And then, when the second lot of sailors came along, they asked me, as a real good proletarian, as a real good law-abiding proletarian, my opinion of my professor. 'Comrade Liagun,' they said, 'what do you honestly think of your old man? How ought we to treat him—to execute him, or what?' Now, at the time things were ticklish, and no one quite knew which bank of the river to make for. 'To-day *this* lot,' was my private thought. 'But to-morrow, perhaps, quite a different lot. Let me secure myself both ways, and then——' Yet I tell you, your honour, that I'm a very straight-dealing man, and that I and my wife live as peaceable a life as though we were in a desert. So I replied to the fellows merely, 'Pooh! He isn't worth troubling about.' And then they held a short conversation amongst themselves. And soon, short though it was, I cut it still shorter. Said I, 'If it's about his papers, and all that, that you're asking, I know nothing about them. I only know that he writes books on science, and that I see nothing wrong with him except his five cows. Remember, comrades, that I'm half dead with consumption—I have been in consumption for a matter of thirty-five years, and know it to be a consumption of the bloodiest kind. That being so, comrades, let him, for my benefit, have at least one of his cows, that black, stocky one there (for you bet I know a good cow when I see it, and had chosen Golanka, an animal with good bowed-out hind-legs) back again. And that the sailors did, and I hastened to begin by making off with her calf, as by then it was nicely fit for table. Then a fresh lot of Communists arrived, but I had taken care to watch for their coming in the town, and had smelt out their minesweeper before ever it had berthed. And straight home I went, and leading

the cow by the halter to the old man, said, 'Good day, your excellency! Some more of our friends have just arrived. Let me keep their hands off this cow for you until happier days shall dawn. Meanwhile you can allow me such feed for her as you think proper. Of course I'd have done the same by the calf as well, but unfortunately it's dead,'—as indeed it was, for I had eaten it. And thirty poods of hay for the cow's feed did I remove from the professor's hayloft. Oh, I own that I used him: but why should I not have done so, seeing that, blind though he may be, he goes in for plottings, and also has plenty of capital to back them up with? Why, I shouldn't be surprised if he's got whole millions set aside for oppressing the workers with a counter-revolution!—Oh, and you mightn't think it, but I myself can speak at a meeting until the audience shivers in its shoes as easily as I can make my tears come bubbling out."

And with that he rapped upon his chest a freckled, veinous fist—peering at me meanwhile with eyes so keen and green and cruel as to induce in me an involuntary shrinking.

"Oh, I know, your honour, that you are one to whom these things can be said safely.—Well, as consumption is an affair that any day may carry one out with a rush of blood, I say to myself, as I cough and cough, 'Seeing that some day such a thing may happen, why shouldn't I, in the meanwhile, denounce whom I choose as an oppressor, and beg off whom I choose?' Oh, I won't mince words with you, for I'm a sick man, and might go to pieces at any moment. Yes. Well, nothing more happened about the cow until those fellows of yours departed across the sea—left us in the lurch, although they were our own countrymen. Then I did go to the old man again, and as usual found him tap-tapping out his everlasting science, and never for a moment thinking of anything else. I reached him, this time, by climbing to his balcony with a ladder which I had laid handy in the neighbouring vineyard, since I had thought to myself, 'If you are the watchman of this estate, that means that you are the household's protector, and should have the *entrée* direct.' Said

I on entering, 'Your Excellency, once more I greet you. And once more I would offer you my very humble congratulations upon the arrival of a fresh lot of our friends.' This time he did sit up—and he is a tall man at that. But of course, being blind, he couldn't see me. 'Well, what about it, Fedor?' he asked, and I replied, 'Let me have Golanka for my own outright. If you don't, there might be some unpleasantness. You know what I am—you know that I am always most solicitous for your interests, but you know too that I am needing milk for galloping consumption of thirty-five years past.' So he—well, he gave me the cow—gave it very delicately—gave it with not a word said. And this noble conduct so pleased me that I went on to add a few words more, and to say, 'Your Excellency, you may now rely upon me to try and influence those fellows, and keep them from hearing of certain—er, of certain little affairs of yours. Contrariwise, any word to your detriment shall be reported to you. Thus the cow shall be your guardian. Now, how would it be if I were to put it about that you specially wish to protect Communists? Nothing, at present, could gain you more honour.' And that brought him to his feet. 'Away,' he shouted, 'you cur and son of a cur!' and stamped his feet, and fluttered like a goose, and wrung his hands and trembled.—For, you see, your honour, I'm a straight-dealing man, and when tooth has to be set against tooth, I——"

And for the second time he peered into my eyes, and with his greenish gaze gave me a sensation as of choking without the ability to move a limb or to put away from me some cup that I was being forced to drain to the dregs.

"Now, suppose something comes to my knowledge. Our instructions are to report everything, no matter what, seeing that the Communists are a law unto themselves, and have openly declared party loyalty to mean that we must inform as much against our own mothers as against the meanest outcast. Well, from that time onward I took to dividing my time between the cafés and the bazaar until I had come to know every officer by sight, and where everyone lived, and who made sacrifices for the cause, and who talked

what. And so I rendered things secure for myself. And there, all the time, was that bourgeois professor sitting tight upon a mansion and a hundred and forty *desiatini*!—So at last I went to my Committee again and said, 'I have found another brother for you, a brother good and true. Here am I dying of consumption, and though he has seven cows he won't give me so much as a glass of milk!' And upon that Comrade Deriabin, President of the Committee, and a very strict man, up and said, 'Ugh! Let the fellow have his last stitch stripped off him. He may be nearly ninety, but for all that Moscow shall write us the necessary "order under threat of shooting." ' Well, what could I really say in his favour, seeing how mean he was, and that he had never contributed so much as a rouble to the cause? So his cows were taken from him. Yes, and his typewriter was taken as well, and for a while he had to rap-rap upon the table. And it was this last, I suppose, that led him one day so to fail in loving-kindness as to call me a serpent, the old swine, and regularly cock a snook at me! And more than that—he soon found a hand in Moscow to help him by getting learned folk to petition that he should be given back his typewriter. Aye, 'for the sake of science!' And it *was* given back to him, though he ought to have been dead long ago."

"Whereas he is still clicking away?"

"Whereas he is still clicking away, and *tough*. Oh, I shall never be able to get on with him entirely.—By the way, you mightn't think it, but, God help me, I have enemies. One man became an enemy of mine merely because my dog made off with his sucking-pig! He said that he would get even with me by poisoning my calf, but as yet I have taken no further steps in the matter. That reminds me. Do you know the Shishkins? If so, what are they like? All that I know about them myself is that that Boris of theirs served with the Volunteers, but somehow managed to get clear afterwards, and now is living at some place in the rocks and writing stories there. More than once I've spoken to him, but he's a cunning fellow. And actually, I believe, he's writing something about myself! Well, I shall soon know if he is,

don't you think? On the other hand, it's a puzzle to know what some of us will do if those fellows of yours should regain the upper hand. For though they ran away, that doesn't mean that they'll never return. Oh, I shall make friends with them all right and smooth things over, and let no grudges remain. A sick man like myself can't always be expected to control himself when he knows that at any moment he may see half a vedro of his blood spurting out. And in any case, when that happens, I shall stand before God as clean as that grassblade there, for His eye is ever upon me.—Oh, and did you know that the Shishkins have done me out of their uncle's garden? Their uncle was Gospodin Bogdanov, and originally a minister, an enemy of the people. And when he went abroad old man Shishkin got hold of the managing of his garden, and so took the bread from the mouth of one who for ten years had been watchman to Gospodé Gogdanov and Korobintzev! But I'm a law-abiding man, I am. Especially did I show myself to be that when some men from a district on the Dnieper came and were for buying my cow. 'How come they,' I thought to myself, 'to have got the capital to buy my or anybody else's cow? Let us have no mysterious dealings here. Such dealings aren't allowed. For all I know, the fellows may have received some great sum from England to bring about a downfall of the Proletarian Power?' So again I went to my old man. 'Don't chew the rag,' I said, 'but give me *leave* to let them take away my cow. For I have just come to the end of her hay.' Hm! Yes."

As I listened and listened to the fellow's chatter I could see that he was drunk, for the freckles on his face were inflamed and his sunken eyes glowing like crevices in a fire.

"Yes," he went on, "though my breast holds a conscience, I say, 'Damn those Shishkins!' A terrible judgment is awaiting them. The Lord Dispenser Himself has told me that in confidence."

For the last time, striking the five freckled fingers of one hand against the palm of the other, he glared into

my eyes, and half stifled me with the spirituous odour of his breath.

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Ah, I will walk the roads no more, hold no more converse with men! Life is aflame—it is fast being consumed. Let me look only into the eyes of animals, though even of animals few are left.

THE ALMOND HARVEST

KASTEL is becoming more and more streaked with russet markings, more and more patched with grey rock, as autumn briskly does its work of tinting here and stripping there. Cranes have taken to uttering their cry at dawn and wheeling in jamb-shaped trails; titmice to whistling in the gardens.

Daily the dawn is growing fresher, and the sky, as it becomes shot with the new, autumnal radiance, more brightly blue by day, and by night blacker and more unfathomable against the stars, and the Milky Way more vaporous and distinct.

Morning now sees eaglets sporting in the heavens—their screams dominating the glens, dominating Kastel, dominating the sea. How the young birds rejoice as they take these first circlings of long-distance flights, and their elders patrol above them!

The sea, too, is developing darker stretches, its surface flecked with dolphins' splashings and studded with notched eddies of foam.

With daylight, with the first grey hint of dawn, human faces come drifting my way—pass—depart. As they pass they look at me, look *into* me, and their eyes, amid the stony hush of the birth of a new day, are as the eyes of tortured beings. The same is true of the dumb creatures in my keeping. They too look at me with eyes as though blinded, as though charged with a pain of non-comprehending misery. Why so? What would they have of me?—Ah, I understand. All too well I am conscious of the meaning of those appeals at daybreak. All too forcibly does my heart tell me what those creatures already standing in another world are praying. And so, amid the profound hush, the profound vacancy of dawn, I swear once more to take their souls' anguish upon mine, and so to honour the glorious departed. . . .

Thus we begin another day. But what day exactly is it? No matter. Away with you, my gentle pullets and skeleton-like turkey-hen. Go and take what may prove to be your last walk on earth.

The farthest corner of the garden has growing in it an ancient almond-tree which, sprawling and twisted like one of my native willows, is fast shedding its pointed, yellowish leaves, and showing through the thinning network of its branches patches of sky more beautifully blue than ever.

As I climb into the tree its branches catch at my rags and scratch me. And in return I fall to beating it with a stick. The sea, from my perch, looks almost near enough to fall into, and the mountains seem to have drawn closer. Perhaps they are wishing to discover why the queer-looking object in the tree is brandishing a stick as it is. Yet have the mountains *anything* left to discover? For thousands of years they have been gazing upon the human whirligig without missing a single detail.

The almonds now are ripe. The fruit has cracked a little, developed crevices in its chamois-leather-like rind, and thrust forth pink-speckled fibres, until the whole looks like a number of freshwater crayfish. Hence each movement of my stick is followed by a thick rustling, and then by the "Toop, toop, toop!" of the pods' young voices as, having shot to earth, they rebound like small gunshot and shed their husks. And pleasant it is to watch, through the twigs, their merry gambolings and dancings. Verily they might be the tree's children uttering cries of delight at having at length obtained their release to become part of the world's food stores. Nay, elderly mother! you need not creak and groan like that, for, provided that you are not cut down first, you will see spring succeed to gruesome winter and be able to spread over yourself again your delicate, cloud-like veil of pink, and joyously bring forth fresh progeny.

From my perch, too, I can see Verba's place on the hill, and near it Tamarka engaged in licking out a dried-up tub so eagerly that the raspings of her rough tongue are clearly audible. But how come I not also to hear the familiar hammering beside the cottage on the other side of the waste ground—

Kulesh's hammering as he fashions stoves out of old iron for subsequent conversion into potatoes and wheat?

I do not hear the hammering for the reason that it is finished for ever. Next there arrives the barefooted Lialia. She goes scampering after stray almonds which leap into the vineyard.

"Good day," I say to her. "How are you off for food to-day?"

"Not very well. And yesterday we had only some crocus-bulbs which we dug up. Soon, however, Alesha will be here with something, for at this very moment he is returning from the steppe country with some grain and some *real* lard."

That I know! I am aware that of late Nurse's eldest son has taken to smuggling liquor in company with Koriak's son-in-law—to crossing the mountains into the regions of the steppes, and there bartering wine for any chance-remaining wheat. I know, too, that that smuggling business is a business which needs to be done with circumspection, in that both on this side of the Pass and on the other the smuggler stands liable to be apprehended by anyone who is strong enough to do so. But as death has swooped down upon the steppes, and the steppes have only death to look forward to, the local inhabitants find relief in liquor, and to obtain it assemble by night in secret places and stand ready to hold out straw-disguised bottles for the few mouthfuls available. So there again we have the bread of subsistence, a bread for which, both on this side of the mountains and on the other, myriads are looking with strained eyes and clutching hands!

"Do you say that you have been reduced to digging up crocus-bulbs? Then take a couple of flat stones and crush some of those almonds between them."

"Oh, *thank* you! Thank you *ever* so much!"

The bread of subsistence yet again! But, oh, that you, my dear, yellow-eyed crocuses, should have had to serve such an end!

"So Kulesh is dead?" Lialia murmurs. "I suppose he died of hunger?"

"Yes—good Kulesh is dead and his troubles are over. But are not you yourself afraid of death?"

Her tense, grey, keenly alive eyes raise themselves to mine for a moment; but for all that her chief concern continues to remain with the almonds.

"See!" she cries. "Over your head! There are three whole almonds there."

"Aha-a-a!—But I ask you again: are you not afraid of death?"

"No. Why should I be?" And she takes another bite at her fruit. "Mamma always declares that death means merely no more pain—that it is a sort of a going to sleep, and that one day everyone will rise from it and put on white robes such as the angels wear, and take to holding their hands *so*.—Oh, close to your head! Close to your head! There are *our* almonds!" . . .

Yes, poor Kulesh is dead—gone to receive *his* white robes, to hold *his* hands "so," with his pain left for ever behind.

During the closing days of his life I could tell that his hammer was coming to strike the iron more and more feebly, and that as he ascended the knoll to his place of work his gait had become so much the gait of a broken man that sometimes he had to halt before he could recover his breath. But always he had remained buoyed up with the hope that the arrival of colder weather would mean a greater demand for stoves in the steppe country, and their exchange for grain, or even for lard! Meanwhile—well, meanwhile there was still the hammering to be done: he could not leave it undone. And so never a stove was taken from the well-to-do but he took his share of its iron—fed, as it were, upon the metal.

Once he halted and leant long against my fence to rest. He was thick-set, and not unlike a bear, with eyes half-hidden under bushy brows, and brown hair turned grey, and a pair of heavy fists pounded, through work, to the colour of leadstone, and shoes so torn into strips as to make his toes catch against the ground, and indescribable clothing, and features so shrunken, blue-lipped and ashen as to resemble a huge blister or a piece of dirty wax.

"Well, Kulesh? Then you are alive still?"

"Yes, I am alive still," came the almost inaudible reply, for now his lips could scarcely be made to serve their purpose, "but I am dying. Have you a drop of water handy?"

When a drink and a dried pear had revived him a little he drew forth, with a shiver, his last source of consolation, his last shred of golden Turkish tobacco. Then he moved away. At last, having much upon his soul and no one to share it with, he stopped and made me his confidant.

"See, now!" he gasped. "To work is useless, simply useless. And to think that there was a time when people came to my place in carriages, provided only that they could engage Kulesh for their jobs. Yes, I have worked both for Gospodin Tolmakov and for Professor Golubev—though since then all my work for them has gone to pieces. Here I might have to mend or caulk a roof and there to fix up a cistern—for whether the job was a water one or anything else, I was the best workman in the district, and had a splendid eye for water pressure, and a light hand. But my taste of tastes was for moulding quaint weathercocks in the shape of birds, figures on horseback, angels, or what not. Nor did those weathercocks ever creak, but, having smelt out the wind, they just turned to it. Once they were to be seen along the whole Yalta Front, for I had a light hand, and all that I made was finely made. Indeed, no matter where you had asked for Kulesh on the coast, you'd have found him respected. For who did the ironwork at Livadia? Why, Kulesh! Who made a roof for the Grand Duke Mikolai? Why, Kulesh. And I was splendid too at casting musical instruments—brass ones. Once the great Doumbadza himself brought me wine from the Imperial cellars! 'Kulesh,' said he, 'you must not leave us, for you have too light a hand.' And did people ever give me champagne? Why, often enough I was drunk upon it for two days out of the seven, and meanwhile determined not to work for anyone, no matter whom, without fighting him about it. I remember in particular a weathercock which I cast in the shape of a dolphin with golden fins. It was meant for an empress's eye, but now, God knows for what reason,

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it lies destroyed. Nor shall I ever forget the baked pie which was sent me from the Imperial table—a pie all covered with mouldings and coats-of-arms, and crowned with *such* an eagle—our own, the Russian all-powerful eagle! My God, the roubles that that pie must have cost!—Somewhere still, I suppose, the Russian eagle is flying? Or is it dead?—Well, that pie was handed me by the head steward from Livadia himself, even though he was a full general in the army. And he said to me as he did so, ‘You must not leave us, Kulesh, for you have too light a hand.’—But now I have moulded my last, for my support of old days is no longer to be got.”

Never did he actually name to me the nature of his “support.” But once, when relating experiences, he said:

“I used so to love sauterne that I would spend as much as two-and-a-half roubles a day upon it. For in those days one had but to go to the bazaar if one wanted any. And could you palm off inferior stuff upon me? Butter? Why, if there was the least bit of yellow about a piece of butter I wouldn’t look at it. Not I! The only butter that suited me was cream butter, butter like a rose, butter which fairly curdled when you cut it. Nor would I have skimmed milk. No, thank you!”

And with a shake of the head he turned and spat.

“The wine that they make now only gives me colic. It burns me right out. What they squeeze out of these wretched grapes now is sheer poison. A former Government clerk has just died of it, with his stomach rotted clean away. Every day I am losing strength. My head never stops throbbing. Oh, the wine that we used to have! When one poured oneself out a glassful of it one could see the sun shining through it like port. I am sure that the ravine where I live cannot be healthy.”

And clapping his hands together with a gesture as though catching a moth, he stood looking at the ground—the bald patch behind his cap, and the emaciated vertebrae below it, and the curve of his bowed and worn shoulders all expressing at once absolute despair and absolute submission.

“My countrymen,” he went on, “what a time, what a

change for the worse you have lived to see, with everyone ruined—thanks to that rascal!¹ For who first got hold of us and put the rope about our necks? We are no better now than dogs under the lash. We understand that *now*. And—complain? Complain to whom? Once a day's work was paid for. Now one's not paid because there's nothing to pay one with. And appealing to *them* is like appealing to a wolf. Besides, complaints, and all that sort of thing, are officially to cease. Say the least word, and you'll find yourself being jabbed in the face with a revolver in a cellar. And the same for the peasant-folk. Not long ago they arrested a party of fishermen and took away their boots. One would think that they had been playing a sort of children's game. 'If,' they said, 'we let these fellows go to sea they'll betray us. If they come back from the sea we'll strip them.' For these Communists of ours are first-rate at jesting. We did better under the old Serf Law than now, for then a man could appeal to the Tsar himself. But from where has *this* fellow come? He sits and prates, yet no one so much as touches him. Where does he hail from? He knows nothing of our ways and is robbing the churches. Why, when they dragged another priest off to Yalta the other day, and a woman said something about it in the bazaar, at once a fellow with a rifle came up and arrested her. Nowadays *anything* in that line can be done—and done without trial or witnesses. It is as though the people have been *murdered*. That 'justice' that they used to talk about? Why, broken necks is all that it gives us!"

And asking for more water, he drank a little—then sucked at his pear.

"Do you think the Yalta Hospital might be able to say what's wrong with me, and write me out a prescription? I was there in 1910, and had milk and eggs, and was ordered cutlets, and given a bottle of Muscovite port by the imperial steward himself. He said, 'We cannot afford to lose you, Stepan Prokofitch, for you have too light a hand.' Which of *these* fellows would say such a thing? Why, whatever it may call itself, our present Government isn't a government at all,

¹ A reference to Bela Kun.

but one great piece of hooliganism. Here have I, after thirty-seven years' work, to lose my life-blood, as I've been doing these two years past, and perish like a worm! Oh, for some mutton—some mutton served with its own kidneys, and in gravy! Aye, or a little *borsb!* How beautifully my wife used to make it! The mere sight of it would be paradise.—I suppose you know that all my daughters have gone away to become hussies? That is to say, and to speak plainly, they've gone to live with commissars. Ugh! It's all like a horrible dream. One good feed of *borsb!* Then——!"

But that feed of *borsb* Kulesh never had.

As he walked away that day he staggered. Then he halted, and for a few moments stood gazing across the parched ravine at the mountains. Ah, that having to crawl back to work, and to do that futile hammering, and to make those journeys to the steppes! . . . So Kulesh stood in thought—then dragged himself away towards the town, and entering, and feeling his way along the streets, at length reached the hospital.

The hospital looked the same as it had been used to do. But surely it had strayed from its position a little?

The hospital said to Kulesh:

"We cannot look upon a man as ill so long as he can die on his own feet. We have the town choked with such as you, and not enough room even for the real invalids."

And Kulesh replied to the hospital:

"Surely, though, this is what they now call 'The People's Infirmary,' the place where the, the—where the *baccili* were before?"

The hospital laughed back at him:

"Ah, the bacilli have all been knocked on the head since then, and anyone wanting treatment now has to provide his own medicine, and to contribute something to our stores, and to settle with the doctor. For hunger won't let even doctors work. Yes, and patients have to provide their own straw. Every one of our mattresses has been stolen."

Then Kulesh pulled himself together—felt about for words. And said he:

"Your roofs are leaking, I see, and I know that you have had your gutter-pipes wrenched off for stove-making. Now, if only you will give me a little food in return, I will mend all those things for you—and mend them cheaply. I—I am feeling weak. Would you look at my tongue?"

The hospital would not look at his tongue.

Once more he glanced at the building. He could see it only as through a mist. Then he turned and departed. Through the little town again he walked. At its farther end, he knew, there was another hospital to be found—and a hospital indeed! He groped his way along the walls, and dusty brambles rooted amongst the street rubbish caught at his clothes. And next he was wandering, blundering over a waste space littered with stones and splintered glass.

There stood in the middle of that waste space a large, round framework building. And suddenly Kulesh remembered how the other day, at a meeting in that building, he had heard the sounds of strident voices, a great rustling of red flags, many threats of bloodshed, and much Communistic self-praise. And the dim recollection caused such spasms of disgust to well up in his soul that involuntarily he halted to spit.

Next he found himself labouring over heavy shingle. And next he saw before him the sea.

Blue and untrammelled, playing and rippling in the sunshine—there lay the sea. Ah, the coolness of it as its breath met his face!

So he dragged himself to the azure expanse, wetted his temples and bathed his failing eyes. Then, feeling a little clearer in his faculties, he bent down the still dizzy head which ever had bent in humility before his fellows—then went upon his knees. Why did he do that? Was it that he had a dim idea of drinking the waters—or was it that he wished to salute them before his final departure? Ah, how the sea seemed to come rocking, rocking, rocking towards him! . . . And when at length he rose, and, large-headed, grey-headed, set forth for home, it was with crablike movements that he staggered hither and thither. Yet he was intent upon home now. Get

home he must before—Yes, get home he must. . . . But ah, the long way homeward!

At last some folk met him. Folk of his own sort they were—folk of the working-class. And they cried:

“Hey, Kulesh! Are you drunk?”

Blindly he glanced back at them. Yes, “drunk” he was. He knew that. “Drunk” on life turned red. And painfully he muttered: “Will—will you give me a hand, for I am going home?” So thenceforth they supported him whilst he groped his way onward—over the bridge, over the little torrent-bed, until once more his own ravine lay before his dying eyes. Then, although for a moment, as he gasped out his last-spoken words, “I shall be all right now, I shall be all right now,” his step seemed to strengthen, he had scarcely touched his home fence before he lurched forward—fell—tried to raise his head again—gasped—stretched himself out.

Yet it was a peaceful enough death. It was only as though a withered leaf had fallen from a tree.

Meanwhile I am finding my seat in the almond-tree quite pleasant. The sea and the sky together, viewed thence, form a wall of blue. And to think that beyond that wall lies the road to great Stamboul, and that in great Stamboul even wharfingers can afford to breakfast off sardines and throw the remnants into the water! And so vast is that sea barrier that the contemplation of it makes my head swim. So for a moment I must steady myself, lest I have a fainting fit.

The prospect also includes a view of the town, with its white stone houses and its russet-hued towers of sunbaked brick. Yes—and of the burial-ground’s mortuary, with its sheen of glass panes. Veritably that mortuary might be, as seen from here, a crystal palace! Well, lying in that “palace” now is our Kulesh. A few days ago he was standing under this almond-tree, and speaking of *borsb* and of mutton in gravy. And now that glass-windowed repository has claimed him. Only his name is left here. Monstrous Life might well inscribe over him as his epitaph, “Kulesh. One of the Many who have Expired of Hunger.”

Yet it is as an honoured craftsman that he lies in that "palace." And to think that though (such is our human stupidity) men here, whilst still possessed of bread and still permitted to engage in trade, raised that crystal erection over a graveyard, and crowned it with a gilded cross, the day has come when men here have not even the wherewithal for their own burying!

For five days now Kulesh has been lying in that human forcing-house, since no grave can be found for him. Nor is he the only one there. By his side lies his one-time friend Gvozdikov the tailor, whilst hourly a third occupant is expected—a man not yet dead. Of these three, two were recently shouting at "meetings," and demanding the property of others. And as "The People's Laws" allow free choice of seized property, those two chose wine-cellars in which to wallow, and gardens and villas and tobacco-plots. But for what? All those stored amenities, and those carcasses of muttons, and those cellars, and those horses and carriages have had their day. And their new owners have had their day—so much so that now they lack even graves to lie in! . . .

Kulesh, in the glass forcing-house, whispers:

"A gra-a-ave!"

And the drunken old mortuary-keeper replies:

"Wait a bit, comrade. You must have patience. Everything must be done in order. You came here to be buried, do you say? Certainly you did, or you'd have done nothing to help me to make a living, but have gone on lying there and whispering and rotting in the heat. But what actually is there for me to get out of you for my food and drink? I don't mind saying to you (as you and I are quite alone) that, so far as I am concerned, you and your like are rubbish. Where else would a working-man be expected to hew out the rock for graves when he's given no food or drink for his stomach? But wait a bit. Our laws now are "The People's Laws," and you haven't been digging graves for two years past as I have. They allow me no rations, I say, but always put me off with, 'Presently, whilst

we consult our colleagues.' And then always those damned 'colleagues' declare that they can't do it. So now I must strip you of your winding-sheet and take it to the bazaar. Bread is scarce, and, besides, I shall have to get you a couple of props and a leaden plate for your memorial, and something to make the working of the spade go easier. And as there *is* only the winding-sheet on you (the rest is just rags and tatters), it's no good for you to talk—you must just lie still. And the same with your neighbour. Look at *his* clothes! He's had his carousings and company-keepings, and now, like yourself, he must go into a common grave." . . .

Yes, poor naked Kulesh has a crystal palace now for his resting-place. Is he awaiting the palace's retinue?

And the sleeper beside him, the tailor Gvozdikov, once was known also as "Worm Hook." When death came to him it came easily. He was, at the time, within a certain locked door in his sumptuous new villa. Of the occurrence his woman, Ribachikha, afterwards related:

"No one missed him until our Tartar servants smelt him out, but by then everything was over, and for three days he had been lying under a cloud of flies. How the Greens sang his requiem!"

And truly his requiem must have been a joyful one! But as this ex-tailor had left no cash, he arrived at the crystal palace in a pair of trousers for which even the bazaar would not have given a groat. . . .

So sleep well, aged Kulesh, foolish Kulesh, Kulesh who once thought that, if only you opened your mouth, somebody would drop "People's rights" into it! For speedily you were ousted, tossed aside, by cleverer fly-catchers than yourself. Never would *you* have seen those catchers lying in the sunshine under clouds of flies!

And you, you obscure "Worm Hook," never will you, like Kulesh, be written of in history. Nor will those myriad unknown who like Kulesh have come to an underground resting-place because they had nothing in their stomachs. For how

could history write about you and them, seeing that history concerns itself not with waste places, with lonely river-banks, with dustbins and rubbish-heaps, with fresh young girlish bodies sold in exchange for potatoes? No, no! Of such trifles as those history takes no account, but only of personages able to converse with the world by radio, and to hold reviews on parade-grounds, and to be stared at at congresses, and to wear frockcoats "built" by London tailors rather than by such as you, O "Worm Hook," and to decide the fate of countless dying souls "in the name of" countless souls already dead. For the benefit of such personages thousands of mercenary, mendacious pens scrape fulsome praises to drown the sound of a nation's convulsive groaning. Such personages can ride in smooth-running motor-cars and otiose steamships. Such personages can have their "departures" limned upon films by throngs of operators. Such personages can pay thousands of complacent scribes to sing—rather to splutter—lying praises of them as "our great ones." Lastly, such personages can have thousands of slaves follow their funeral cars with sumptuous wreaths, after that other thousands, thousands of the ragged, have been whipped up from their labours in order that, as the car pursues its way, they may acclaim the departed's "boundless love for the people" amid a solemn dirge-playing of bands and a flaunting of red flags, and a sickening paying of tributes to "our late leader now in the course of being buried." . . .

So sleep soundly, O you stupid and inoffensive Kulesh, for you are not the only one to have been deluded with resounding phrases and cozening falsehoods. Millions of others, too, have been deluded. And millions of others will be so yet.

And, for that matter, you were not wholly a fool, Kulesh, for long before you had reached the burial-ground you had realised why people had ceased to drive up to your door and demand your services, or to send you port wine—long ago your hopes had become limited to gaining for yourself a few poor morsels of bread. Yet once the cunning catchers of flies cried to you:

"All the workers, we intend, shall become filled full with

food. Already the Soviet Government is building electric aeroplanes for the purpose—each of them capable of carrying five hundred poods-weight of provisions, so that the Crimea may be fed to repletion! ”

And so they blinded your eyes to the accompanying bloodshed, and affixed stout seals to your ears, until you shouted as merrily as a boy:

“Long live the People, and the People’s Government!”

The weeks, months, passed—and no aeroplanes. Commissars began to quest your daughters, the bread supply came utterly to an end, officials yelled at mothers, “Your youngsters, or into the sea you all go!” And meanwhile I would say to you:

“Well, my good Kulesh? What about those aeroplanes?”

And, pressing tightly together your hungry, chattering teeth and blackened gums and faltering lips, you would repeat as before:

“It must be that they fear to make a landing. Think of the mountains—of the sea. Probably they are afraid of crashing.”

And to look upon your face as you spoke would be an agony.

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No, Kulesh; you were not a fool. You were merely—*simple*.

"ONCE AN OLD WOMAN HAD A GREY GOAT"

By now I have cleared the lower portion of the old almond-tree, and must ascend a little higher.

Arrived at the top, I see approaching my house near-sighted Schoolmistress Pribytkov, from the villa "Tikhaia Pristan." She has on her shoulders an empty sack, and on her feet wooden slats which make a "clack-clack" as she walks. And she is strongly built, and has two children, Vadik and Koldik, and believes her husband, murdered in Yalta long ago, to be still alive among those who at one time or another have escaped across the sea to Europe. And that she should retain this belief is just as well. She has living with her her indefatigable old mother, the wizened and ever-restless Marina Semenovna, the warrior who is for ever at war with the sun in an endeavour to save her vegetable plot. . . .

And I too would gladly see this parched wilderness vanish, and hark back to the days when the folk of the district lived on good terms with the sunlight and first converted a waste into a land of gardens.

Even "Tikhaia Pristan" began by being a waste of stones and prickles. And it continued to be so until the day came when a queer old specimen of a retired police superintendent, an enthusiastic lover of roses and of quietude, vowed that by hook or by crook he—yes, he, a retired police superintendent, with another hand or two—should beat the place's stones into "a kingdom of roses marvellous to behold." And to that end he gave the soil all that he had to give of money and of thought, until by the latter days of his life the soil had broken into smiles and become the "Tikhaia Pristan" of his dreams. With spade and hoe, from morn till dusk, did the old man work at the place—labour with sand and concrete, labour with water and sunshine,

plant, graft, construct, rail at workmen when they stole his nails or even his stonework, repeatedly threaten to throw everything up, repeatedly think better of it, and wear his very heart out. So one day he found himself sitting on his own verandah, smoking his hookah there, and delightedly admiring and enjoying the glory of it all. And when soon afterwards he died he did well to die just then—it was just in time, or otherwise he, a vile cur of an ex-police official, would very soon have been dug up out of his rose-garden and sent to meet his fate in a cellar or a ravine.

Well, now that "kingdom of roses" is going to rack and ruin. Now it can show only roses wild, tangled, blighted, and root-suckered, and a reservoir cracked and sagged, and pear, cherry and Grecian nut-trees dried and warped, and peach-trees broken and untrained, and water-pipes leaky, and once-crisp paths overgrown with weeds, and a vine plot open to all the winds that blow, and flowerbeds choked with nettles and docks, and trees half strangled with ivy, and immemorial oaken stumps surrounded with crackly outgrowth and bind-weed in amicable embrace with seacomb, and a universal mass of the sort of garden-weed entanglement which breeds nests and cocoons as it spreads farther and farther its enmeshing, corroding, boring tentacles, with blue chicory and red carrot overlaying bulbs, and "field roller" sprawling over banks, and a batch of yellow-bellied lizards basking on stone treads of steps, and dusky toads croaking their rusty night song in the green ooze of a ruined reservoir. Yes, year by year "Tikhaia Pristan" is returning to its native desert, redissolving into rock and affording re-entry, as never fails to happen on man's departure, to primeval chaos.

However, wizened old Marina is doing what she can to hold the chaos in check, and to preserve at least the vineyard as a plot for vegetables, and with hoe and with trowel to fight the winds and the sunshine and the cows which demolish her fence with horn and flank, and then nibble at such few things as the heat has left alive. Also Marina Semenovna has a few small Marie Louise pear-trees left, and some Ferdinand pear-trees, and last but not least a spot

below the reservoir where still one can pluck a grassblade or two, and which is the goats' plot, and as such is a holy of holies.

Yes, for the Pribytkov family have some goats as well, and in particular a goat so marvellous as to be known all over the countryside. This goat, originally obtained from a hut near Chatyr Dag in exchange for a counterpane and an embroidered blouse, was reared through strenuous effort and prayer alone. And what a goat it has grown to be! Its output, this incomparable Prelest's output, is four bottlefuls of milk a day. And to feed their pet Vadik and Koldik scour garden and dell for herbage and twigs and pods and litter from one end of the day to the other.

“Little goat! Little goat!” is their cry. “Oh, our *darling* Prelest!”

And the goat, staked under a pear-tree and blinking narrow eyes, lives easily—dozes at intervals, chews the cud, and secretes milk enough to depress its brown udder to its very hoofs. Oh, Prelest is no ordinary goat!

Never do I sally forth to seek my miserable turkey-hen at dusk but I feel that I must go and contemplate “Tikhaia Pristan” and the Pribytkovs. For then, ye gods, the goat is being milked! From a distance I peer at the scene. Standing without a single muscle stirring, as though it understood the greatness of the process that is being wrought, the goat chews and chews, and blinks its eyes ecstatically. And meanwhile Marina Semenova milks it with a consummate skill which constantly induces the goat to assist her by straddling its legs more widely still, and practically to say, “Come! You may have my all,” whilst Vadik and Koldik tender the animal morsels of pear, and from time to time cry, “Oh, Prelest, our Prelest!”

And, yes—it is pleasant to hear the milk burbling into the cut-glass milking-pan, and to watch it gradually creep up the pan's transparent sides. The whole operation is accomplished in entire peace, whilst the goat is chewing its shreds of pear. And when it is over the goat lies resting, with the sunset's fading glow tingeing its grey limbs to violet and its little eyes to red, and the milk within the pan's sparkling facets to pink,

and the foam on the milk's surface to all the hues of the rainbow, whilst Vadik and Koldik stand regarding the vessel with their little arms clasped about each others' necks and their mouths watering, and something—possibly the goat, possibly one of the barefooted youngsters—emits an occasional chuckle or burble.

And fastened to a stake nearby there is another item of "capital," another source of salvation and hope. And that other item of "capital" is an adjunct to Prelest, a large, smooth, grey-hided billy-goat with spreading horns which is named sometimes Sudar and sometimes Bubik.

And the neighbourhood knows how that billy-goat was reared, and how, since being unsexed, he has put on flesh, and how on a given date he is to be slaughtered. And many people look upon all this as great good fortune, and are envious of the Pribytkovs. In fact, at a recent school union meeting for distribution of meal—and meal nowadays has to be weighed to the last thirty *zolotnik*—the schoolmistress was told that she could not have any.

"Don't dispute it. You know that you've got the luck to possess that huge goat of yours."

And the seventeen *zolotniki* of meal went elsewhere.

Every time that I meet Marina Semenovna in the Deep Ravine she and I fall to talking about Bubik.

"How is Bubik to-day?" I begin.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" she replies. "He is becoming a perfect ball of fat. To look at him, we might almost have stripped the flesh from ourselves. Every day I give him snacks of meal-cake, as well as collect for him—well, the acorns that we've collected by scouring the ravines would serve, one would think, for four. But then it's all like putting money into a bank, for soon the weather'll be colder, and then the lard in him will rise and clean and set itself. And, you know, goat's lard is every bit as good as pig's."

Such was the animal that one day even neighbour Verba, that dour little wine-mixer, paid the Pribytkovs a visit, though owing to an imagined grievance against the Pribytkovs for having forestalled him in occupying "Tikhaia Pristan,"

he had not been near them for a year past. Yes, unable to contain his curiosity any longer, he duly made the journey.

"Marina Semenovna," he said, "I have come to see that goat of yours, which I hear is a marvel."

Marina Semenovna mentally signed the goat with the sign of the cross and furtively spat to the left. For what if Verba should cast a spell upon the animal? At least his eyes were of the dark variety.

"Very well, neighbour," she replied; "but when you look at him, pray do so—well, kindly, with an eye for luck. Yes. And isn't he growing a splendid creature, a regular mass of flesh and dripping?"

Verba contemplated the goat fixedly, introspectively. He eyed it this way and he eyed it that. He clasped his hands *so*, and he clasped his hands *so*. He balanced his head at every conceivable angle. He peered into the goat's very soul.

And Marina Semenovna? Well, she stood regarding alternately Verba and the goat, probing alternately Verba's soul and the goat's, realising that her own was becoming filled to overflowing, waiting, getting ready for emergencies.

"Well, neighbour," was Verba's long-delayed, meditative pronouncement as he pulled at his pendent whiskers and (so Marina afterwards told me in the Deep Ravine) nearly made her heart stop beating, "I feel bound to give you my best and most neighbourly compliments, and to declare that that animal is, is—well, that it is not a goat at all."

"E-eh?" the startled Marina Semenovna exclaimed. "It is not a goat? Then what is it if it isn't that?"

"I say again, Marina Semenovna, that the animal is not a goat, but rather a State bank."

This absolutely melted Marina Semenovna's heart—dissolved it in triumph and pride. For she is a husband-woman to the core.

"And, neighbour, I have something more to say to you. I wish to say that such a goat in hand ought to get you through the winter splendidly. Why, his weight cannot be less than a pood and a half, if not two poods."

"You *can't* mean it? Well, I daresay that two poods is his weight. And think of the lard that'll come off him!"

"Twelve pounds of it, probably."

"In-deed? Then I have a good eye for such things, even though I had never brought up a goat before. Or maybe there'll be *twenty* pounds of lard?"

"We-ell, scarcely that, Marina Semenovna, though possibly up to fifteen pounds may drip frm his carcass."

"Aye? Well, just pinch his flank, neighbour—there, just under the belly."

"My God! I can see what you mean! Yes, his tail alone shows what he must weigh."

And so, the goat having been inspected and reinspected, the old man departed still thoughtfully plucking at his beard.

The truth is that he and she are thorough peasant souls, and think more of the productive life than of any other. Indeed, who would not love an existence of prayerful labour on plot, in garden, in harvest-field? The soul capable of rising to that height finds even the birth of a lamb or the ripening of a corn crop a subject for a hymn of thanksgiving, and dwells in kindly communion with sun and soil, and is a husbandman in spring able to foretell the buds' bourgeoning from the winds, from a gentle rainfall, from the fact that a rainbow projects its arch. Only to the spirit that is as dry and empty as a wind-blown rock do hymns of the soil seem unintelligible and uncouth. Only such a spirit is so moved by greed for amassed pelf as to dub the inspired dreams of the husbandman "business." Verily must this latter term have been invented by one of those seeing yet sightless beings who detect alike in spil and in produce only potential profit. . . .

In addition to Verba, that devotee of husbandry, the Father-deacon of Yalta came to see the fabulous goat. Said he:

"What I behold is a four-legged lottery containing no blanks. Marina Semenovna, I venture to adjudge you our grand mistress of agriculture. To which I may add that before now goat-fauns such as yonder have earned medals. As regards breed, your animal is from abroad. If I mistake not, he is of a Swiss strain well known to me."

Indeed, Marina Semenovna's goat became such a celebrity that after a while the good Father-deacon felt it incumbent upon him to reascend the path to "Tikhaya Pristan," and secretly leave a warning there. He said to Marina Semenovna:

"Marina Semenovna, my conscience urges me to advise you in your orphaned ones' interests. That goat of yours is giving me bad dreams—arousing in me qualms of nervousness. For all the town is talking of it now, and all the town knows that Bezruki lays hold of cats, and that Father Vasilii has had his chocolate-coloured dog decoyed, and that you yourself possess this sumptuous goat, and that you live absolutely alone. So guard the beast well, I pray you. Guard it like the apple of your eye."

"The Lord preserve us!" And Marina Semenovna crossed herself and the goat. "Never for a moment will I take my eye off him, especially as Koriuk has just had his cow killed on the ridge and taken to Garshina to be cut up, and the Bekletovs have had *their* cow driven off, and——"

"Yes, that is why I am speaking to you as I am. And a *twelfth* cow has yet to be slaughtered. Yes, Marina Semenovna, a *twelfth* cow. Evil dreams to that effect have been visiting me. So let us bear in mind that, celestially speaking, our hope is in the Lord God, and mundanely speaking our hope is in our livestock. Would that I could have my byre fitted up with an electric alarm such as the Germans used on their entanglements! Then any marauder touching it would be thrown into convulsions. Unfortunately no electric power for the purpose is to be got."

Said Marina warningly upon that (for she was feeling not a little disturbed in mind and inclined to be vexed with him for having been its disturber):

"Yes, and just you take care that one of these fine nights you don't have something carried off."

"I have nothing for men to carry off, whereas *you* have that goat, and a goat, *experto crede*, is not a difficult thing to make away with, seeing that a goat is what? A creature as dumb as it is stupid. On the other hand, a cow is a creature able to

gore the night-prowling thief—which is much more to the point than the goat's terrified hoof-stampings. So I repeat, Marina Semenovna, that your risk is considerable."

So that very day, after she and the Father-deacon had nearly in their alarm said the one word too much, Marina Semenovna fitted the byre with three chains which made the wooden erection jangle like a steel safe, and wedged the door with some forked branches as a sort of *abattis*, and hung the *abbatis* with empty meat-tins in such a way that any malefactor impinging upon the carillon would infallibly alarm the household.

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The schoolmistress halts beside my fence and pours forth a string of complaints against a rich Tartar who has left her unpaid for half a pood of Grecian nuts ever since the previous winter—though, to be just, he has duly let her have her fee of barley for instructing his children.

"Folk are losing all honesty," she declares. "And he an Orthodox Tartar, too! And yesterday he killed a sheep without giving me the head as he ought to have done."

Then she went on to the next miscreant:

"Uncle Andrei, too—why, he is a regular villain. First he lets his young pig run loose in our garden and root up all our potatoes, and then he steals the linen from our clothes-lines, and then he takes and sells our old bottles."

After which heaping of much distressful, nervous talk upon me, the schoolmistress thanks God that at least there is garden refuse still to be got hold of and taken home. She and her family can eat it, she says, and so can the goats, whereas if one goes to work in the "People's Gardens," all that one will receive in payment for one's labour is a small bottle, a mere thimbleful or two, of wine. And what is that in winter?

As I sit listening to her in the almond-tree and watching the young eagles at their sport over Kastel, I suddenly bethink me: "How come she and I to be here—I sitting perched in this tree in rags and tatters, and she standing there barefooted,

with an empty sack upon her shoulders—a pince-nez'ed tramp who, to live, must rake over vacant gardens for refuse? Who has so turned our lives to mockery? And how comes that woman to have in her eyes the same set expression of terror as is in Drozd's?"

"I suppose you've heard, too," she goes on, "that yesterday the chapel caretaker flung out the body of that Michael who had stifled himself with charcoal? Yes, he did it because Michael had been excommunicated before death, and when Michael's wife arrived the corpse had disappeared and couldn't be found anywhere. That was because the dogs had come upon it and made off with it. Yes, and yesterday I met Ivan Mikhailitch in the bazaar. He was wandering about the place all dirty, and with his eyes sore and running, and wearing his big straw hat and carrying a basket. I watched him for a bit as he went the round of the stalls, and saw him bow twice without speaking. The first time was when a man gave him a bruised pomegranate, and the second time was when a man gave him a handful of salt fish. And when he caught sight of myself he came up and said: 'My dear, see me garnering in the name of Christ! Yes, now that I am an old man, I am not ashamed of garnering so, for it is a commission entrusted to me of the Lord Himself. In more than one heart, as you can see, my walking along in this manner reawakens our Saviour Christ.' And that is how he goes about philosophising. Yet to think that he is one who once earned the Academy of Sciences' prize and gold medal for his book on Lomonosov!"

I feel my head turning giddy, and descend to earth again. Ah, how the great blue wall was beginning to rock, rock in my direction! . . .

Even when I reopen my eyes they still have greenish-blue rings revolving before them. The schoolmistress has departed. My only companion is my little heap of almonds. Even Lialia is gone. Well, I must hasten to get the fallen fruit into my sack. . . . How misty the mountains are looking! Again I gaze at them . . .

Oh, the times and times that we have ridden up those

mountains! And oh, the halting-places there, with the tinkling urns of the wayside cafés brewing coffee which smells like saffron, and their kitchen-ranges frying *chureki* in mutton-fat, and Turkish road-makers snoring under the mulberry-trees with blue cloaks thrown across their ample stomachs, and their swarthy, copper-coloured arms flung out, and little clusters of gnats dancing over their upturned faces! All the hot air is droning and buzzing and water purling behind a neighbouring rock, and a dog, fly-enveloped, making a leisurely meal of a dried mutton-bone, and a motor-car throbbing as it swallows mouthfuls of heat and dust, and . . .

Again my eyes reopen. Then still the almonds have not been collected? Oh, I must hurry, hurry! . . .

As Greek and Italian masons stand chipping at heaps of road-stone my brain re-echoes the strokes of their mallets, whilst wiry Tartars on lean, vicious-looking horses keep riding up to the café's threshold and jauntily flashing their teeth at us before taking balls of *katyk* out of an earthenware jar, and consuming them with mutual greetings of "Ai-da! Alakoum selyam!" as with their bridle hands they restrain their impetuous steeds. And blue puggarees are fluttering from phaetons, and a bottle thrown from a carriage breaks into splinters as it pitches upon the stones, and mosquitoes are humming in the torrid air, and some bullocks are whetting their horns against a stone-heap amid cries of "Away, you devils!" and tobacco-drying frames are standing festooned with leaf, and everywhere in sated, surfeit-swooning garden and in shimmering, stake-rowed vineyard, Tartar women are gliding about as they cull the vintage harvest's clusters, and bare-legged youths shuffling hither and thither as, with tall wooden bucket a-shoulder, they convey the reaped grapes to the wine-press. Everything within sight speaks of wine. Everywhere grape-juice is trickling forth to dye worker and vat and doorway with must and exude odour from fermenting-tub, and half intoxicate the blue-aproned mixers and make their ladles move ever more slowly.—But now we must remount again. It is high time, and the heat is less. . . .

But—time? Time for what?—I am but standing in my

garden with an almond in my hand. Once, when a boy, I should have been delighted with the almond, but now an almond's structure has come to be more familiar. No one is to be seen. Even Lialia is gone. I am alone with my usual companions of parched soil, heated air and scrip-scraping cicada song.

THE END OF THE PEACOCK

OCTOBER's course is nearly run now. More than once has snow gleamed and melted on Kush-Kai, and dawn has begun to strike sharp and cold, and the mountain slopes have turned from brown to black with the fall of the leaf, and my pears have become golden, and sunset now shows all the gardens flame-coloured before the winds come to strew them with litter, and the grasshoppers have departed, and my last three pullets can go foraging afield no longer, and we ourselves are contemplating subsistence solely upon meal of grape-pips. Well, there are other people eating that meal. Yes, and there are other people dying of such eating. Everywhere now the meal is sold in the bazaar instead of bread, and, wretched stuff though it is, can be got even at that only by an effort, or through earnest begging. Sour and bitter it is, and apt soon to become fermented over with mould. And though one may pound it, and cook it, and——!

Also the sun on rising out of the sea now takes a straighter course and marches at a lower elevation; whilst whenever I look into the Deep Ravine I perceive the place to have, as it were, completely surrendered, and its masses of "field roller" to be lying flat. And the same as regards the ravine nearer to hand. Nor does the latter now show a peacock standing on a balcony to greet the sunrise. No, never again will that bird greet either the sunrise or myself with a flapping of its wings and its wild, free, ululant cry. Then has it selected another spot for the purpose? Its call rings out no longer. It has altogether disappeared. . . . So long as it was here it somehow recalled to me former days as its beady little, mournful little eyes regarded me. . . . Well, not for four days now has it been in sight. It has become as much a thing of the past as is the Ekaterinoslav schoolmistress's

tumbledown villa—whence, a few days ago, someone or another ripped out the last-remaining window-frame.

Ah, it is with remorse that I recall the evening of calm quietude when the poor, hungry, trustful Pavka approached the empty bowl for the last time and tapped upon it, tapped upon it long, with his beak. As everyone knows, famine can tame and subdue even the wildest of creatures. And always this had been the case with Pavka. Coming close to me that evening, the bird looked into my eyes as much as to say once more, "*Won't you give me something?*"

Poor Pavka! . . . Yes, but oh, the lure of that tobacco, of that Lambatkan tobacco—or alternatively of *no* tobacco!—So, scarcely knowing what I did, I stooped down and seized the bird—seized it with the dexterity which, though dormant within me hitherto, was really inherited from ancestors used to capturing the beasts of the field. And then, as the bird voiced its terror, I grasped it firmly by the throat—grasped it all the more firmly because in that moment there somehow swept over me a sense of revulsion against that beautiful creature—against the "eyes" in its tail-feathers, against the abandoned dance of death which it had been executing, against its desert cry of ill-omened note. Yes, somehow, in that moment, I conceived that the bird symbolised something at once fatal and intimately connected with myself. . . . And as I applied my whole strength to choking the life out of that blue, flexible, sinuous, silken, serpent-like neck the bird struggled wildly, tore at the front of my rags with its talons and beat its wings against my breast. For though hungry it still was strong. And only when its eyes closed, and became overlaid with a sort of whiteish film, did I relax my hold. And as the poor creature sank back with a gasp, and its neck gave a momentary quiver, I stood horror-struck over the body, and trembled as surely he who has slain a human being must tremble after the deed.

Yet, thank God, it was not completely killed. With all speed I proceeded to massage the velvet, coroneted head and satin-like neck. . . . And at last it opened its eyes, looked at me, and—shrank away. . . . Ah, but you were right to

do so, Pavka, for in very truth I had given you cause to fear me. . . . Yet, though it shrank away, it could not regain its feet. It was too weak to do so.

I stood gazing at it—overcome with shame and remorse, and longing for someone to take it away. And at last someone, a good little girl, did take it away. . . . And now that little girl herself is gone, as oh, so many other fair and beautiful spirits have departed. But that evening she said to me:

“I know a rich Tartar in the bazaar who might like it for his children to play with.”

And as I watched her carry the poor thing away with train drooping and swaying behind her I looked upon poor Pavka as gone for ever.

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And now this has proved not to be the case. Pavka departed that evening, but returned later, as a constant reminder to me of the past—of sorrows and of joys, as again its voice called from the desert. . . .

Yes, the bird dwelt for a week at some café or another in the bazaar—presumably waiting to see whether it would finally be accepted by the rich Tartar, and meanwhile was played with by the Tartar’s children; but when the Tartar had definitely declined to accept it, it returned to its wilderness and its villa, and confronted me, in dawn’s hushed hour, the very next morning. This time it trumpeted forth what sounded to me like a pæan of victory. Yet where now was that beautiful fan of a tail, that “eyed” train of all the colours of the rainbow?

“Ai-o-oo-a-a-a!” the bird screeched.

Was it complaining again, was its mind once more uneasy? Yes, surely it was, for the rich Tartar’s children had possessed themselves of the tail by pulling it out by the roots! And at the sight of this I felt more than ever sorry and ashamed. Oh, I had no desire now for tobacco, or for anything else in the world! To think that I had played such a cruel jest upon the creature!

So when the bird resumed its pacing of the wilderness it did so despoiled and mutilated. Nor did it ever again ascend the ravine and perch upon my gate. For it—*remembered*. It merely went on searching for food as before. It searched everywhere except here. And it is doing so, as best it can, still.

Again, therefore, it belongs to nobody. It has entered, as it were, upon days of darkness. For no one has any use for such a possession.

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At Gorka a commotion is toward, for thieves have visited "Tikhaia Pristan," and Marina Semenovna shouts to me as she hastens towards the town:

"What things are done nowadays, with poor folk such as I am stripped of their everything! Aye, and it's folk whom you might think were decent schoolmistresses and doctors' daughters that do these things sometimes. Why, at dawn this very morning, I saw a woman taking away something out of our wing, making off with a part of the late police superintendent's furniture. It hadn't yet become properly daylight when I heard a noise in the garden and looked out. And there she and some men were making away with a bedstead and some tables! Oh, she excused herself and her hurry by saying, 'Pray understand that I am doing this in virtue of having been appointed a custodian of public property, but, for all that, to think of a well-born hussy being able to say such a thing! Aye, it was, 'All these things now belong to the people, and might in any case have been stolen.' But I mean to have the last tin-tack brought back again."

The next thing is that a stealthy-footed man passes my place. He is lean, and wearing puttees, and carrying a rifle. He halts outside the garden and asks to be given something to drink.

"People are stealing things everywhere," he says. "Everybody is doing it. And there is only myself to patrol the whole town. Already I'm half-dead with trudging about. You see, the authorities (I know their ways, mind you) would like

people to think that every robber is arrested, but that is all rubbish. As a matter of fact, we take care *not* to arrest robbers, for we've got nothing to feed them upon when arrested. But things weren't like that under Governor Michael. Under Governor Michael the whole town would soon have been in the lock-up. Ah, those *were* times! Our ration then, every day, was a good feed of *borsh* and two pounds of bread. But the other day we did run in a cow-killer. For the first five days he sat tight, and wouldn't confess. Then we cut off his ration, and when he grew weak gave him a 'bath' and a dose of massage. Yet he wouldn't confess even then."

"But why a bath?"

"Oh, you thickhead! Don't you understand? Why, to smarten up his wits, and yet leave no mark upon him—we stretch them *so*, you know, with their hands held *so*." And the fellow illustrated how such a "bath" was administered. "Oh, things aren't done gently under the People's Government, they're not just played with. 'Do you confess, or do you not?' Then we sent for a doctor, and 'Comrade' Governor says to him, 'This man seems to be dying,' and the doctor says to 'Comrade' Governor, 'That is so—dying for want of food. Give him a bit of something,' and 'Comrade' Governor says to the doctor, 'I assure you that we have no ration available,' and the doctor says to 'Comrade' Governor after a spell of thought, 'Then let him go to the hospital, and write him out a card of admission.' And when the hospital returned the man, saying, 'We don't recognise starvation cases as hospital cases' (pretty stiff, wasn't it?), we had to let out the fellow on bail, and he died almost immediately. So much for our new 'justice'! But still that's no fault of mine, for I myself am under authority and must do what I'm bid. . . . Oh, hang them all! I wish I had never seen them. . . ."

"I wish I had never seen them!" . . .

Verba's little son comes running from the knoll, and waving a pair of small hands, cries to me:

"Your peacock, your peacock! Do give me another keepsake."

My peacock? And in any case where is it now? I have not

for long past heard its mournful callings or seen it walking in solitary state about its wilderness. So what keepsake can *I* provide?

Suddenly I catch sight of a broken "eye" feather. It looks newish. Probably it has been a replacement feather, and would seem to show that the poor bird is trying to begin life again and partially succeeding, in spite of its being nobody's. The boy's hand already is grasping a silver feather evidently fallen from a wing, and with it a plume of pinkish yellow that is a miracle of beauty.

"I picked them up," he explains, "in the vineyard below the hill. I expect they dropped out of the peacock when the doctor threw his stick at it and missed it. Perhaps the peacock has been eaten by the dogs by now?"

I cannot help thinking of Pavka's little eyes as they bade me a final farewell, and consigned me thenceforth to the limbo of the forgotten. And once it was such a friendly bird, and would ask me so trustfully, "*Won't* you give me something?" before humbly departing! Once, too, Pavka used to begin our every morning for us. Besides, it was not of its own accord that it went into its present seclusion. *I* caused the parting. *I* led the proud, lonely creature to isolate itself in the void and to begin a new life as a nobody-at-all's peacock. More than ever do I now find the place a desert, for even the proprietor has disappeared . . .

The boy goes on:

"Do you know, once upon a time it used to go tapping about the doctor's place, even though the doctor never had a groat to give it. By the way, yesterday the doctor came and borrowed something of us; and when he had gone we caught *such* a smell of roasting—a smell like there would be if your turkey-hen were being roasted."

Then had the doctor eaten my peacock? Heavens! Or had Uncle Andrei eaten it? At all events, Andrei was asking me about it recently.

"Oh, and do you know, we've just lost our other goose. We believe that that rascally Uncle Andrei took it the same as the first. We believe it all the more because the goose used to

keep breaking into his garden and getting at a bowlful of frogs which is always croaking there. But I mean to kill him someday, to wait till it's got dark and shoot him from behind with a double-barrelled gun. No one would be able to arrest me for it, for I'm too young. Besides, I should say that it had come of the trigger getting caught."

I pick up the feather remnant of what was once, but is no longer, my Pavka, and with a dumb grief in my heart lay it as though it had been a freshly cut bloom upon the verandah floor, near the dried apple. That apple, when gathered, was the last of its fellows. And, the feather deposited, the emptiness of everything seems greater than ever. I look at the apple lying baking in the heat, and oh, how vain, how vain seems life!

THE INFERNAL CIRCLE

THE thread of life, spun from an unseen skein, keeps gathering to itself heat and glowing more and more ruddily. Yet surely the strand of hope in that skein is breaking? At all events, my dreams continue so persistently to be dreams of another world that sometimes I wonder whether those dreams may not be a type of my hope, gradually absorbing the imprint of the existence that is to follow. And that new existence—is it to be reached only through the Gates of Hell?—Ah, Hell is no invention of the imagination, but a real place which lies before me at this moment, a place of a charmed, magic circle of mountain and sea. And in that Hell day succeeds to day merely in a sort of changeless and purposeless sequence—a sequence so changeless and so purposeless that human beings grow confused and bewildered within its confines, and start groping about for a way of possible escape. Thus am I myself groping as I walk and walk around my little garden, or go plunging through the thickets, and wander with all about me a sort of dark sense of perplexity which will leave me only with death—and perhaps not then. . . .

At the moment dusk is falling in my garden and a young moon appearing from behind a mountain-peak. Kastel is looming black. From Babugan night in its entirety is approaching. But see! Just at the foot of Babugan a bright speck has begun to glimmer. Has the long grass there caught fire, or is what is burning a sowing which might have grown into a wheat crop? In any event not the latter, for in that spot wheat is sown no longer. Such is the spot that for any sowing of the kind to become possible there would be needed human beings able to live upon other resources until the rank soil had sloughed its bloodstained defilement. Then is there burning at Babugan's foot a funeral pile? Quite probably, seeing that

on every road within the magic circle, and on every night of the year, human beings are falling to the dagger or to the bullet. And ever the limits of the magic circle are closing in, and forcing people to live in derelict villas and wayside huts and tumble-down byres — out-of-work road-menders, ex-laundry hands, helpless old women, mothers subsisting upon a few shreds of dried fish. Nowhere else have they to go, since what would it avail to climb the mountain road to the Pass merely to die there, and so pass into the unseen? That can be done just as well where one is. And in any case, what is there so very terrible about existence in a shack? True, one's daughters may be raped there; but even so the rapers may throw them back a crust or two!

No, from the infernal circle there is no escape: not even by praying to the rocks to fall and engulf us, or to the sun to scorch us up. Depart? What should *I* gain by leaving my villa and these ravines, desolate though they are? And what of my beautiful young nut-tree there? Were I to depart, at once there would arrive men to lop its branches and uproot and take it away. No: departure from within this Hell's ring-fence is sheerly impossible.

By now all my tobacco is finished and I have taken to smoking chicory. But perhaps someone would buy my books? Well, my books are no longer at my free disposal—and, for that matter, why should I want them to be so? Yet a purchaser of *something* would be welcome. Not long ago someone was speaking to me of, of—oh, of what? I cannot remember. Yes, I do, though. He was telling me that he had wanted to buy a "Complete Encyclopædia" which he had seen, a work of the kind which I too once dreamed of possessing. And to that he added that, encased in a "sumptuous binding," the work, the whole set of volumes, had eventually gone for a half-pound of bread per volume. Wherefore it is clear that someone still has a use for a "Complete Encyclopædia!" Well, people once wrote books in these parts, as well as sold them, and one could see their productions lying, bound always *de luxe*, under glass covers. Especially do I remember some books belonging to Mother Yiurchikha. Splendidly got up

those books were, but, for all that, they had in the end to go for bread at the usual half-pound rate. Well, well! As a matter of fact, books, even a "Complete Encyclopædia," must have come to be of very little use to her, seeing that she had come to have living with her only a two-year-old grandson. And what could a baby like that do with an encyclopædia? Or, for that matter, can he count even upon growing up, seeing that he is an infant without father or mother? Well, now, after having lost her husband, the old lady is dwelling near the sea in a derelict garden-hut. She has seen her son murdered. She has seen her son's wife die of cholera. And now she is spending her old age in that hovel. True, there is the little grandson with her, yet things are lonesome in that desolate spot, and day and night she can but listen to the sighing of the sea. Peculiarly a thing of her own that sea is. On it both her husband and her son used to earn their living. The son was the first of those two to be killed, for in time "Away with all officers!" came to be the cry. "Lieutenant, you must come away from that sea of yours, and accompany us across the mountains. Certain formalities have to be observed." For, instead of making good his escape abroad with his comrades, this particular lieutenant had chosen to remain where he was, in the hope of being left unmolested. But it was not to be. And now, with the sea sighing its day-long, night-long moan beside a deserted garden, an old woman can find no rest, but sits staring into the darkness as she listens to the splash of the waves and the breathing of an infant.

Yet one must live, and the executioners at least had left her a keepsake in the shape of a little one belonging to the same sea as herself. So from a secret hiding-place amongst the rocks she drew the sea-cloak of her dead officer-son, and sold the cloak, and thereby made it clear that someone still could find a use for such a garment (a splendid cloak it was, with a deep fur collar to it), whereas for an old woman it was quite unsuitable, and as for her grandson—well, he *might* one day come to be as big a man as his father had been, and therefore able to fill the cloak, but also he might first be

murdered: any day the men might return, and say, "Who is this youngster whom you have living with you?" and she reply, "The son of the officer-son of mine whom you slew after serving as a lieutenant in the Russian Navy, and helping to defend his country," and the men thereupon exclaim, "Aha-a-a! A *Lieutenant*, was he? Then away with his youngster! All such have to be removed. Hand him over." Yes, it was not only possible but probable that that might happen. Had not an old woman been killed in Yalta only recently for a similar reason? Yes, that was so beyond doubt. And because that old woman had been unable to walk along her captors had pounded her with the butts of their rifles, and shouted, "March, you ——!" Yes, they had struck her although her hands had been trembling with excess of years. And later, on the day when the sentence was to be carried out—and the order for it had come from Bela Kun himself—the men had exclaimed again, "So you refuse to walk, do you?" and in daylight, in the sight of all, bundled her on to a handcart, and so taken her off to the fatal ravine. But why, since her husband had been murdered earlier (ah, *he* had walked along firmly enough), had the old woman needed to be put to death at all? For the reason that after the slaying of her husband she had had the impudence to continue keeping his portrait upon a table in front of her, the portrait of a general officer who in his time had defended a Russian fortress against German assailants, the portrait of a man who, for doing such a thing, had very properly been executed.

At the same time, is not the question of reasons out of place in such a connection? Possibly even the slaughterers themselves did not know why they had to perpetrate the slaughterings. . . .

Another idea that occurred to Yiurchikha, in addition to the idea that her grandson might be slain before he could grow to the cloak, was that one day a radiogram might proclaim, "*All* old men, *all* old women, and *all* children are to be put to death. Let them, triumphantly to signalise our victory, be thrown down mine-shafts, shot in ravines, cast into the sea." . . .

And yesterday an old man named Golubinin passed away in "The Professors' Haven." I remember him well as a man to be seen walking (or rather crawling) about in blue spectacles and a last-remaining pair of breeches, or tremblingly sweeping his front doorstep. But his last three months he spent in a cellar. And why so? For the reason that, that— Well, how came he to be at the seaside at all after October? Was he minded to flee his native country?—At the end of those three months, however, his release was procured through petition, and during his eleven last days of all good folk brought him titbits, since otherwise he would have had but the air to eat. And so, in the end, God's mercy sent Death to remove him from his tiny garret. His final act was to drink a cup of tea. And lucky he was to have such a thing to drink!

Yiurchikha is kindhearted, but also in her time has been foolish. As an instance of this, she had no sooner exchanged her dead son's cloak for bread, groats and milk than she invited some guests to honour the departed with a feast! And every one of the invited attended that feast, and sampled the bread, and smacked lips over the milk. And even when the feast was over, and she was once more pacing the garden with her little grandson and contemplating their joint sea, she bethought her what else could be bartered towards a second such entertainment, and a few chairs and a glass-fronted cupboard being available still, asked a likely purchaser to come from the bazaar, and complacently watched him put away bread and a jugful of milk. For it was so nice to have company to eat with once more! But what of the coming winter? Oh, winter might never arrive. Yes, or else winter might be prevented from ever again arriving.

So, as the old woman paced her garden, holding her little grandson by the hand, and gazed upon his and her sea, she told him of how his grandfather had sailed the waters. Also for a while the grandfather's portrait, handsomely framed, hung upon the hut wall. And through doing so the portrait nearly proved its own undoing, since one day men arrived who inquired—

"Whom have you got there, old woman? Anyway, why have his sleeves got gold piping?"

"He is my late husband, and was a sea-captain when alive."

That was enough. At once the men decided to have the captain down. They desisted only when the old woman tearfully explained that that particular captain had been a *mercantile* captain only, not a naval one, and had voyaged all over the world. To the men, of course, the very word "captain"—!

After that the old woman put away the portrait in a secret place—then once more paced, paced the garden, turned and turned about within the exitless circle of the inferno. . . .

Similarly have I to pace, pace my garden. For whither can I depart? Everywhere things are the same. I strain my vision over Russia, over her boundlessness as she lies stretched from sea to sea, but only to realise once more that our plight is the plight of all within her, and that she is being torn asunder at every point. Whither, then, can I flee? On every side there is spurting blood and plough-land has been replaced with waste.

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Something is glimmering before me under the cypress-tree. Something whitish it is. Whence can it have come? And it is, it is—oh, behold, it is a crumpled packet of cigarettes! Actually of cigarettes? Yes, of cigarettes, of real, veritable tobacco! Oh, what good soul can have placed it there?—Why, Marina Semenovna must have sent them. Yes, Marina, of course. Who else? That is the more probable because I now remember her to have asked me, only yesterday, whether or not I had given up smoking. Clearly she sent the cigarettes by the hand of Vadik, and he, the dear little fellow, unable to lift the latch of the gate, and not liking to cry out, solved the difficulty by throwing them over the hedge. Well, thanks, all thanks, for the gift, and the more so, the more so because tobacco can deaden thought!

AT "TIKHAIA PRISTAN"

THROUGH the gathering dusk I go groping my way to "Tikhaia Pristan," for the place never fails to comfort me. There are children there; there is a farm there, even though of the humblest kind; there is an old woman there who, despite her frailty, is struggling bravely instead of sitting with her hands folded, and waging the contest with a systematic allotment of the day's every hour to work, and with the sun for a clock, as though she were the last surviving violinist of Life's disrupted orchestra.

By the time I arrive the goat has been full fed and Marina is rounding up her four caricatures of ducks. Meanwhile, seated under a pear-tree, Uncle Andrei, a black-visaged Little Russian, is puffing at a pipe and spitting between his knees, with his form arrayed in a new suit which he has fashioned out of some canvas belonging to the late police inspector. On his head also is the dead official's felt hat.

"And so you're not ashamed of yourself, Uncle Andrei?" I hear Marina rap out at him as I draw near. "Yes, you may say what you like, but *I* call it thieving."

"Marina Semenovna," I hear him reply, "you are much too ready with your tongue. Why, after all, should I put myself out to work? Perhaps I *am* a ragamuffin, and a beggar, and a pig: yet isn't everyone else now forced just to sit about and do nothing? It's time that the 'comrades' have done away with the lords and ladies who used to loll the year through in four-storied mansions, but those 'comrades' are taking *our* things as well—everything that they can clutch: and how is that going to help us, for all that 'everything belongs to the people'?"

"Well, you are just rotting away. And once you were a decent man, and worked in the vineyards, and kept a cow."

"Now, don't you go trying to flatter me. What work is there to be got now? The work season for the year is over. Next spring I intend to make for the steppe country."

"Only to find that there's nothing to be done there either—simply nothing, with business gone to rack and ruin the same as here, and everything managed by the peasants!"

Yes, that's true enough—now that you mention it. I had heard so already. Then, all the more, why slave? Have you no sense left?"

No reply ensues. Only the ducks go waddling along in the direction of their roosting-place with their peculiar gait.

"At the same time, it's wonderful how you've managed to bring up those ducks on bits of leaf alone. There's only one word for it, and that is 'magical.'"

"For *me*, my good man, the only word is w-o-r-k." Clearly Marina is beginning to lose her temper. "Aye, that's the only watchword that *I* care about. *I'm* not one of those who go peck-picking at other people's property. *I'm* not one of those who sit suck-sucking at wine-bottles."

"So you've said already two dozen times. Here am I trying to have a bit of a quiet talk, and you only itching to begin a squabble! Anyway, it's my own wine that I'm drinking, for I've just sold my pig. And as for this canvas suit of mine, well, the inspector's dead, and lucky enough to be so, for as an official of constabulary he wouldn't have been left to live another hour. Always, as you know, we've had plenty of folk to say, '*That's* where the police live, and *that's* where there are some priests, and *that's* where you'll find merchants, and officers, and the rest.' Oh, folk always knew everything about such people, to their very innards. But the ones that made the most row when they were caught were the Socialists. Some of those at Sevastopol shed tears till one wept oneself. 'Help us!' was their shout. 'If you'll help us we'll give you our all in exchange!—Well, has anyone a better right than I to wear this canvas suit? It's not for you, who are rich compared with me, to throw the suit in my face.'"

"Am I rich, did you say? Oh, you had better go and sleep it off!"

"It is my own affair whether I choose to do any sleeping or not."

"Then don't go misnaming me again."

"Come, come! What a spitfire of a railer you are! How can I walk about naked? How can I sit here in your presence without breeches? Why, I should be ashamed to do such a thing."

"Again I advise you to go and sleep it off before the worms begin eating you."

"Before the worms begin eating me? Why, hasn't everyone got to be eaten of worms? At any rate, that's what the Scriptures say—you as much as anybody else, and as much as any dog or any crow. Well, now that I've sold my pig and provided for myself, don't let's have any more unpleasantness. It's only family unpleasantness that makes me drink. Take that wretch of a Lizabeta. She ought to have her head screwed from her shoulders. What about my cow? And what about her young hussy of a daughter going gallivanting with a sailor, and leaving me in the lurch?—Aye, I want my cow."

In the shabby reservoir nearby some toads re-echo, as it were, Uncle Andrei's croaking. He is a man in whom, when drunk, a sort of mean spitefulness comes bubbling to the surface.

"Turn on to your other side, Uncle Andrei. At all events, which side did you sleep on yesterday?"

"What do *you* know about it? Sides, eh? Why, if I liked to do so I should sleep on my stomach. Don't you go dictating to me."

"And don't *you* go using abusive language to *me*."

"And don't *you* go trying to persuade me that you know anything about gardening. You don't understand *anything* about gardening, whereas I know how to manage a garden properly. I'm one who could have managed the Imperial estates themselves. You should have seen how I gardened for that old simpleton General Siniavin at Alma! For he was no good at gardening himself—he did it only in the bookish way, whereas I did it in the practical."

"I know all about General Siniavin, I know everything about him that there is to be known. Don't you tell me lies."

"Oh, I suppose you know everything in the world! In fact, is there any single thing that you *don't* know?—My word, but how our sailor-lads pounced upon him in 1918! Their first remark to him was, 'So you have a nice big garden, have you?' and their next was, 'You've been drinking the people's blood and exploiting them. Oh, a telegram has told us all about you.' Then into the garden they went. It was a place, you know, where the general had always had things done on an absolutely regular system. And there, Heaven help me, they came upon myself. 'Who are you?' they cried. 'You are a wage slave, we suppose? Then how has your master treated you? Has he treated you hardly?' 'Aye, he has that,' I replied. 'It's all been because of his system.' 'Oh? Then he too shall be treated on a system.' And what I had said had been true enough so far as it had gone, for sure enough the general *had* had everything done to the last nail—each specimen labelled with a tablet and a name that only he himself could read, and so on. Well, he fairly burst into tears when they led him out into the garden! 'Now it will all go to pieces!' he exclaimed. 'However, at least let me say good-bye to my favourite pear-tree. Only look at its first buds coming out!' Oh, it was touching, touching, I tell you! And the sailors said, 'Which is your favourite pear-tree?' and he replied, 'That one over there' (a graft from a stock reared at Livadia it was). 'Pray lead me to it, to my "Empress" tree.' And with a laugh the sailors did so. 'Is *that* it?' they asked once more when they had reached it. 'It is,' he replied. And then a great burly fellow walked up to the tree just bursting into bloom—and r-r-razz! in a trice the tree lay pulled up by the roots! 'That for that "Empress" of yours!' the sailor said. Aye, and then there came another r-r-razz!—from two rifles this time, and serve the old counter-revolutionist right! Anyway, when I had opened my eyes again our good General Michael Petrovitch Siniavin was gone for good, and the sailors were just relieving a pocket in his breeches of a cigar-case. Also he had possessed a flock of geese with knobs on their beaks—some sort of a Chinese breed.

Those geese afterwards were roasted on bayonets, and a splendid feast they made."

"And you too feasted on them?"

"No. I, I—well, instead, I said a mass for the general. I did that, you know, because I sort of felt sorry for him. By the way, the cigar-case must have been a very special cigar-case. Anyway it had a monogram on it, as a gift from some pupils in acknowledgment of being taught about the harm done to gardens by garden pests. Aye, at any time you could see the general walking about with a pair of pruning scissors. And if he came to any shoot that seemed likely to grow into a bad one, snip, snip went the scissors, and our garden——"

"*Our* garden, indeed? Why, what had *you* to do with that garden or its people? Just hold your tongue, and don't try to fool me. And, for that matter, you're doing as little work now as you were then. The worms 'll have got you before the year is out."

"There you go, Marina Semenovna! But it's stupid of you, all the same. What are you and I, really? Oh, I know you say that the Lord God has commanded every Orthodox Christian to work: but——! Anyhow, that slut of a Gashka ought to have her head twisted off for stealing my cow. Aren't I forced to think of the winter? Yes, of course I am."

Thus germinating there are the seeds of a drama. But the truth of the matter is known to everyone, and it is as follows.

When the Revolution came about Uncle Andrei found himself at a loose end, and began by leaving Alma, near Sevastopol, and going, or rather riding on horseback, to look for his wife Lizabeta, who was in service as a maid in a Yalta boarding-house. But soon the horse which he had taken to carry him thither began eating its head off and bringing nothing in: so, having sold the animal, he for a while joined Odariuk in distilling contraband spirits. And when that proved a failure he fell back upon living solely on Lizabeta and a cow and a calf which she had taken immense pains to rear. But before long, unfortunately, and through his fault, his daughter Gashka took up with a cut-throat of a sailor from

the neighbouring look-out post, and left him with his barque self-scuttled. His amiable plan had been first to get hold of Lizabeta's cow entirely and then to settle down; but now this sailor had bobbed up with a "should you like to see the Che-Ka? Anyway you'll soon be doing so if you don't mind what you're about," at every turn.

For that sailor was not like Gospodin Siniavin!

The sailor in question was quartered, with six others, in a villa formerly the property of a doctor; and the party's duty was to watch the sea and to give warning should any counter-revolutionary vessel arrive. And no sooner had they entered into possession than they put the doctor out of doors, evicting his bees from their hives and consuming the honey. Then they converted the garden into a mass of filth. For truly they were fine young fellows indeed!

"Our orders and our duty," they asserted, "are to watch the sea through our binoculars."

These choice spirits were men with necks like bullocks, fists made of lead and teeth of ivory. And they walked with the regular long-boat swing or roll, and had for their true occupation girls, brute pleasure and destruction, and for their personal adornment finger-rings, watch-bracelets and looted cigar-cases. And though hunger was everywhere around them, *they* had carcasses of mutton to eat, fat stuffs in plenty and an abundance of wine. For, of course, their work of watching the waters was a very important task indeed!

Meanwhile they made Lizabeta minister to them. Next, one of them made off also with Gashka the daughter, whilst abstracting Lizabeta's cow by way of dowry, and stabling the animal in the cellar of the late doctor's villa. And that done, he proceeded to divide his time between drinking the cow's milk and debauching the girl, whilst Uncle Andrei, his barque grounded, sat and racked his brains as to how the sailor could be got out of the way.

Nightly, too, a free and easy spirit of cheerfulness would lead the men intermittently to discharge their rifles seaward at random. Nor was it long before the garden had had its last rose plucked for lady-loves.

Yes, by then even the rose, the queen of flowers, had been proclaimed national property!

Also they burnt down the fences and strewed the garden with the ashes. Also, one day when they were taking a walk they sighted some more cows, and those cows as national property at once entered into private hands and disappeared.

Meanwhile Uncle Andrei was sitting by and meditating as to how best he could get hold of Lizabeta's animal. And at last, saying to himself, "*Somehow* I'll get the cow out of that villa's cellar, seeing that now we can be our own justices, and the People itself is one," he rose and returned to his quarters—that is to say, to the wing of the late inspector's villa. And on that same evening I was sitting with the other inmates of the villa on its darkened verandah. Vadik and Koldik had been put to bed, and Prelest and Bubik-Sudar had been chained up in their fortress.

"That man is going to the dogs before my very eyes," Marina said to me wrathfully. "I keep saying to him, 'Do, do something to get the place into shape again. See how I myself, though an old woman, am working my best to bring that about. Yet the other day you could let your pig go and eat up half my kitchen-garden because you were too lazy to get food for it with your own hands!' And all that he replies is, 'Don't you worry. Nothing really matters.' Aye, but look at the rack and ruin. Here am I and my daughter slaving away, and he living scot-free! Once everybody's slogan was 'It shall be ours! It shall be ours!' and now the people are dying off like flies."

Her stubborn contest, wrestle for life always moves me deeply. Never does she let the spade lie idle! I take her withered hand in mine and try to thank her for the cigarettes.

"Ah well!" she says. "We must not allow life to end yet. It must be *helped* to live, it must be *helped* to live."

For it is not her creed that life means inertia or concealment amongst rocks. She declines to admit that we are destined to see life dissolve like snow before the sun. Still floating before her eyes she has a restoration of this ruined "kingdom of roses," with its tiles, with its stakes pulled from the hedge, with its chopped-down trees. For she is a marvel and

nothing else. And there are a few other reasoning human beings. Yes, but they have been driven into the wilderness, and forced to the one preoccupation of winning a crumb or two.

"And now," I say to myself, "I must intrude upon this faithful soul no longer, for she has her little grandchildren to attend to."

Just as I am departing I meet the schoolmistress on her return. She produces for my inspection the fruits of her questing. Those fruits are a morsel of sour meat and sufficient vine-leaves to fill her sack. Not since morning has she tasted anything, yet now she is all for baking me a patty!

"I thank you, I thank you," I say, "but already I have had something, and with it a good drink of milk. And where did I get the milk from? Well, from a good little girl who brought it with the words, 'Someday one of your pullets may lay an egg. *Then* you will be able to pay us back.'"

But I know, alas, that never will those pullets lay. Already they are sinking fast. Indeed, for want of strength, they have not even developed their winter plumage.

CHATYR DAGH "BREATHES"

ALL night devils have been dancing upon my roof, knocking at my walls, bursting into my dressing-room, whistling and howling. Which means that Chatyr Dagh has struck another blow.

Last night its crest was capped with a level cloud-sheet. To-day there is issuing thence a gale of wind. Also by this time the whole mountain-range has lost its gilding, and put on instead the blackness of dead winter, a blackness which makes the villas at the range's foot look more than ever white and timorous under their mountain canopy. In truth, the charmed circle of the Inferno now lies bare and swept. Nor, when Chatyr Dagh is "breathing," avails it to seek cover, for that "breath" is such as to shake even the other mountains out of their loneliness. Look at them! See how, with peaks protruding from forest cloaks, they are peering forth to see what may be afoot! And ever, as they stand and gaze with their stony, awakened eyes, their hollow, motionless eyes, and Chatyr Dagh emits its "breath," those watching mountains seem to shout at me in chorus, "Get ready!" Only the Tartars are not afraid when Chatyr Dagh "breathes." They have known the giant too long for that.

Frankly I myself am afraid of it. And what does the command "Get ready!" mean? Ge tready for what? For death? Surely no further preparation is needed for *that*?

The wind bowls me along on my errand of going to call upon a Tartar to whom I sold a shirt last summer, in the hope that at last he will pay me its price in grain. Yet I have little expectation of the grain being forthcoming. I hope at the best to extract a little tobacco.

His abode is situated near the burial-ground on the other side of the town, and my route lies through ravines which look at me and yawn, and through vineyards which are strewn

with nothing but blackened vine-cusps, as the vines' stakes have all been removed for firewood. By the way, whose is that villa over there near the wheat cove, a villa resembling a coachhouse? Well, once it had dwelling in it the Rybachki family.

Some of that family have now had to say "Farewell!" In particular have the daughters of the family been haled away to a cellar, for their slender young bodies to be enjoyed by all and sundry. And as regards the villa's remnants, the wind is whistling through its roofless walls of concrete, whilst the mother, cowering in a wretched hovel, is bewailing with a mother's love a three-year-old boy who has just been taken from her. Ah, I myself know that grief. I myself know the meaning of a son's departure.¹

The mother had reached middle life before Fortune vouchsafed to her the unexpected joy of adding a son to her six daughters, a son who one day might grow up and become a sailor on the sea like his father. And one of the daughters, some three years later, came running to me at Gorka. Through her sobs she said:

"We are afraid that our little brother, our only brother, is going to die. Mamma is trying to keep him alive, but she cannot do so much longer on such food as we can get, even though she herself is still strong enough to have had another baby."

For by that time the family had consumed their everything—even their cow, and a small stock of food which their father's union, the fishermen's union, had sent them. The father had died a short while earlier. He had died after heating some grape-pip meal in a saucepan and making his last meal of it. Yes, after rearing a boat's crew of children, and vainly applying to the authorities for help on their behalf, he had once more to leave his children, put out to sea, and enter upon his longest voyage of all. . . .

Chatyr Dagh's "breath" drives and hustles me along, whilst vine-trails, tearing away from the fences, entangle them-

¹ The author's son, a mere lad, was shot by the Bolsheviks without trial.—TRANSLATOR.

selves about my legs. Yet I am not thinking of the mountain's breath. What I have floating before my vision is a mental picture of the dead fisherman, old Nikolai Rybachki. Never was he one to let his heart fail him even in the worst weather at sea, but holding off from the land would drive his barque to Odessa or Batum or anywhere else. Ashore, however, it was different, and there at last his courage did desert him. And once, as he sat by the family's little stove amongst his girl-children, and with a great weather-beaten, blue-veined hand, compounded for them some sweet gruel, he told me through set, clenched teeth of how he had just been to see the person in authority known as "Comrade" Deriaba.

"Every one of those fellows at Yalta," he said, "is a Government fellow. And such a lot of rooms they've got, too! As we waited and waited we kept being driven from one room to another. And everywhere there were close-cropped females and revolver-armed boys and bangings of seals upon papers. Yes, those are our new masters! But I know that what they're doing is stuffing the people into graves. And there wasn't a single man amongst them with a beard on him. All were clean-chaven." . . .

And how well I understood your shame, O veteran of the seas, and knew that though it was such as to move you to tears, at least those tears relieved the burden of it. It is known to me also that after you, crippled and deformed and encrusted with sea-salt, had succeeded in circumnavigating the many rocks besetting "Room No. 1," and in executing the many tacks necessary to achieve port, you did at length behold before you your "Comrade" Deriaba, a dignitary vested in beaver hat and skunk coat, a "comrade" whom you felt sure would "be at your service" for all that he is a broad-jowled, bull-throated clod. And it is known to me that, like the simpleton that you were, you did in very truth address him as "comrade," and lay open to him your heart, and tell him that seven souls were starving to death in your home, and that you yourself were ailing, foodless and workless, and driven to look only to him and his. Why, therefore, need "Comrade" Deriaba have bawled, with a wolfish scowl,

in reply, "It is true that the Government undertakes to find food for the people; but are we to grow food for you alone?"—and then have struck you with his fist?

In short, I know that "Comrade" Deriaba gave you neither mutton, nor wine, nor butter, nor even his hat. Also I know that afterwards, whilst you, O ancient toiler of the sea, were sitting in the corridor with a dirty old handkerchief, a handkerchief taken from the pocket of a pair of ragged breeches, held to your aged eyes, certain men, men in tight-fitting officers' overalls, came walking past you from the day's shootings, and that as they strode past you they were chewing sausage pasties, and that, after wiping your rheumy old eyes once more and blinking them a few times, you involuntarily lifted your nose and wistfully sniffed the succulent odour, and that as at last something caught at your heart you rose and stopped a lean man who had a revolver in his hand, and said to him (and God knows what a struggle you had to do it):

"Comrade, at a meeting last spring some of your commissars said that you were sorry for the people, and desired them never to hold back from resorting to you for help. Well, would you, please—would you now be so good as to enrol my family in the party as Communists? Both they and I are dying of hunger."

Now, as it happened, you had run right into "Comrade" Deriaba's secretary himself. So the functionary with the revolver asked you:

"And what qualification have you for membership?"

And your innocent old self, not understanding the phrase, failed to perceive that the fellow was laughing at you; whilst even if you *had* understood the phrase, you could not have said much for yourself. True, you had the "qualification" of half a century of toil upon the seas; but of course, O greybeard, this was not enough. And you had the "qualification" of ribs permanently fractured and disabled through a fall into the hold of your vessel, and of legs rendered permanently infirm with the buffetings of the winter seas; but, again, even those credentials were not enough. The truth is that you lacked the supreme "qualification" of all. For

never at any time had you spilt a drop of your countrymen's blood. You had not qualified to admiration, as had that other man, by shooting victims without number in cellars. *That* is why the man in question was glutting his stomach upon sausage pasty and permissibly treating you as his inferior.

I know that after the man had asked you the question you glanced at his shifty, alien eyes and finicky, spillikin shanks, and gasped:

"Then you mean that I and mine must perish?—Ah, take at least my children into the party!"

Nay, you even suggested that you should go and fetch those children forthwith, and the fellow met the suggestion by saying:

"By all means bring them if you like, but so far as we are concerned we shall merely throw them and yourself down the steps."

To which you retorted with a hint of menace in your voice:

"Nay, any throwing shall be done by myself—and it will be a throwing of my children into the sea."

To which the reply was:

"Pray do it, then. The children are yours, not ours. You're merely one more fool of the sort that thinks he ought to have everything."

Then what did *you* do? Why, you just turned homeward and slunk back to your wretched hovel. Nor did you even make renewed application to your fisher-mates, since you knew that, though they had given you a little before, now they themselves had come to the end of their resources. No, you just resumed your eating of grape-pip meal until it killed you. And now, old man, you are at rest. The earth has taken you to itself—kindly that earth is. Generously it receives us all. . . .

Next I find the wind bowling me through a vineyard where horses' bones are lying. And on a clearing wholly exposed to the wind's buffetings I see standing the villa which once belonged to Ivan Moskovski. Only its walls are left, but even they will afford me shelter for a moment, and enable me to

regain the breath which Chatyr Dag's "breathing" makes so difficult. And as I reach them I find there a young fisherman named Pashka, a lad with a head on his shoulders who, like myself, has sought shelter on his way home with some new acquisition concealed from marauding eyes with an armful of straw. Perhaps it is wheat received in exchange for wine.

"How now?" I ask him, and he replies in the rough diction of the seas:

"Ah, but those fellows have touched us under the fifth rib and stringed us like fish. As soon as ever a man comes in from the sea they lay their hands upon his catch, and pay our *artel*¹ only for a tenth part of it. Oh, it's a fine thing that they've invented, is that 'Communism'! *They* rule the roost, and share any jobs going, and grab the food, and *we* have the choice of slaving for them or of finding ourselves in a cellar. However, in our *artel* (the fishermen's *artel*, you know, with sixty members in it) we at least know how to hold our tongues. Those fellows look at us, and look at us, but we never tell them anything. Not long ago they offered us another ten per cent. on condition that we didn't put by any fish for ourselves; but still we didn't talk. On the other hand, if we get to know of a spot where we could dispose of the *whole* of a catch, and make for that spot as a landing-place for the haul, oh, they're quite up to the game. There's the Black Rocks, now. There they've rigged up a special look-out station for our benefit, so that just when one's in the middle of emptying one's boat, up comes a fellow with 'What are you landing it here for? Are you trying to work against the Government?' And if you were to give the scabby brute a dusting down you'd precious soon breathe your last, for behind him there'll be a sentry, and behind the sentry a whole company of Red soldiers sliding down the cliff. Aye, that fellow'll have to have the fish given him, or he'll take it for himself. Merely say a word or a curse, and it's 'So you're trying to subvert discipline, are you?' For you can bet that the fellow'll declare himself to be a commissar."

¹ Workmen's association of the minor order, as distinguished from a general trade union.

"Well, even if he is, it's by a Government of your own that he'll have been appointed."

Pashka's eyes flash. He sets his teeth together.

"What do you mean?" he retorts. "How is that Government 'our own?' No, I say again that they've smitten us under the fifth rib. Why, the latest thing is that they've made that precious Committee of theirs holders of everything that we use—of our tackle and gaffs and boats and fish-holders and everything else, and put the stuff under lock and key, and then told us to go back to our catching! And they've even taken away our shoregoing boots. In fact, we're slaves now. It's likely that we should go to sea again! A short while ago, too, they threw three of our mates into a cellar for 'opposition,' and before we could get them out again we had to kick up a row and make the Centre receive a deputation and refuse to go afloat for three weeks. Well, as soon as we *did* go afloat they cut down our percentage by another half, and for good and all made it impossible for us to find a market anywhere on our own account. So now we've been doing little more than nothing for seven months past, and growing thinner every day. Yet actually they say to us, 'You fishermen ought to be feeding the whole town. Remember that it's a *Commune* that we've set up. Aye, and with them alone grabbing every bit of the food! Why, once we caught a white sturgeon, and all that they gave us for it was a scrap of soap apiece, before presenting it to some boss or another in Simferopol for nothing! Could such a thing as that have happened in the Tsar's time? Why, in the Tsar's time we could ask for a white sturgeon whatever price Livadia was pleased to appoint. Aye, for in those days there was *freedom*. And how much do you suppose I used to earn? Well, enough to keep three fish-cart horses, and to wear patent-leather boots and a twelve-jewelled watch, and not to mind the girls seeing me. But now *they've* got all the girls, and can keep them because they supply them with food. Aye, any girl they like they can get hold of—even of girls gently born, and twice they've arrested our priest and taken him to Yalta, and forced us to go and stand surety

for him rather than be without a priest at all—for we would never do that, you know. Oh, for my own part I mean to get clear of here before my strength's gone and make for Odessa, and then for Roumania. But *why*, I should like to know, have those fellows gone and ruined our people? Look how they stripped some of Wrangel's men to their breeches, and then drove them barefooted across the mountains, though the men had only joined up in order to get some food. It made even us fishermen weep to see them being knocked about in the bazaar. One man had nothing on him but a counterpane, and another only a shirt, and so on. Aye, those commissars *have* slopped it over our people and no mistake! They go starving folk to death in cellars, and shooting one of them in one place and another in another, so that they shall never be traced afterwards, and even putting bullets into the old militia by thousands at a time, though those militia were only citizen-soldiers. And why? All because their God-damned Bela Kun orders it so! And then there's that secretary woman of his, that Zemliachka. No one knows her real name, but she's a regular brute, a regular piece of carrion. And there's that Meiklesohn as well. I saw him for myself once when I went to try and beg off a friend of mine. He's the Che-Ka's head man, you know, and a ginger-haired stick of a rascal at that, with eyes as green and cruel as a snake's. And he and the other two are our three chief bosses, the conscienceless brutes! I saw that friend of mine in prison, and he said to me, 'Every night the alarm goes, and they parade us in the courtyard and make us wait until a red-capped fellow comes along. He's always drunk, you know, and he'll walk up to a man, look him in the eyes, and then—r-r-razz!—hit him in the face. And then there comes the usual picking-out, and the removals for execution.'

On Pashka finishing, I ask him:

"But surely it is in your own name that all this is being done?"

He refuses to admit it, and I continue:

"I say that it is in your name that people thus are being robbed, thrown into the sea, shot in hundreds and thousands."

"No!" is his protest. "Don't tell me such rubbish."

I bellow back, in an endeavour to shout the wind:

"Nevertheless, it—is—in—your—own——"

"No, it is not! The truth is that those fellows have gone back upon their own words and altered them all."

"No. What they have done is that they have used you for their stick, killed off the best of you, lured the rest to plunder, led men to betray their brethren, got astride of your necks, and are making you pay. And the payment is not yet ended, though it has been made by old Nikolai, your mate, and by Kulesh, and by——"

I can see from Pashka's mien that in his heart he is aware of the truth of it all.

"And our people on the Volga," I continue, "have made the payment not merely in hundreds and thousands, but in millions. However, eventually the bloodshed will not have been in vain. One day there will follow the *reckoning*."

"Yet what fools our people are!" Pashka says, frowning. "And you could make them realise that only by lining them up on the shore, giving every man and woman of them a spoon, and telling them that, if they would eat and drink, they must do it with sea-water. All the same, though, there *are* some of us who are learning what has been boiled for our benefit. A man can look to see a happy day now only when he's lying in the grave. For myself, I'm off to Girla. I mean to have done with it all."

Pashka stoops to pick up his sack, and then I perceive how fine-drawn and ragged he is.

"I have wheat here," is his remark. "I had to run five versts to keep it from being taken."

The wind cuts short the rest, and with a despondent wave of the hand he bends to the tempest, and sets forth across the vineyard with vine-trails catching at and tripping up his feet.

And I also continue my journey—striking downwards next towards the site of the doctor's almond orchard. On that site some boys are chopping firewood. Well, let them! But good-bye, O almond-trees. You will never again know a spring

blossoming or hear blackbirds whistling their songs at dawn. . . . Northward Chatyr Dagh is roaring out its "Do-oo-i-i-i-i!" and sending blasts wailing over the doctor's garden and fallen almond-trees. I glance at the sea beside the orchard site and perceive the drive of Chatyr Dagh's hurricane to be lashing it to a foam-streaked turmoil. Meanwhile the stumps and their lopped boughs are moaning, sougning, beating to and fro. It is as though they were Chatyr Dagh's scourges. The wind scurries through them, tries again and again to find a way out, and renders the desolate land vocal.

Presently I begin to wonder whether the doctor really is alive still in his retreat behind that hillock. Then the wind, with its jostling, throws me fairly off the path. I catch at some briers, though, and a rush lands me at the bottom of the ravine. Well, it is something to have got even *so* far. But what next? Shall I go and call upon a woman near here whom I know, seeing that I am making my last round of the neighbourhood? Yes, I will go and pay my respects to a just woman set in a naughty world.

A GOOD AND SELFLESS WOMAN

A HUT of clay. A row of dry, wind-tossed marrows. A fence bearing some fluttering clouts. A fowl with one leg staring at a closed byre. Ah, the poor, shivering cripple!

Everything in the place, for that matter, is crippled. On the roof of the byre there can be seen a piece of the dead Kulesh's handiwork in the shape of a negro weathercock. Every now and again, as the negro jerks to and fro, he kicks up a highly polished boot or naked foot. But Kulesh is gone, and the byre's owner, Prokofii, the biblical shoemaker-student, is gone, and the negro, Kulesh's charming art gift, looks lonely as he meets the gale with uplifted leg.

Yes, Prokofii lived to see Antichrist come and then gave up the ghost. I know the manner of his passing. One day he walked long about the neighbourhood with its empty-eyed villas—pored over the Commandments—looked everywhere about for "The Seals," but most of all for "The Seal of Antichrist." Then returning to the hut he seated himself beside the stove.

"Come, Prokofii!" his wife said. "What now? There's shoe-mending to be done."

"Another decree has just been issued!" he gasped. "And that decree bids us surrender our towels and shirts. So I am waiting, I am waiting."

"But waiting for *what*, stupid? Think of the children!"

"For a sign, for a sign," he replied. "And when the sign shall have come, I will——"

"You do so frighten me! God preserve us, but what sign are you expecting?"

"The decree has been issued! Nay, also we are to give up to that man¹ the crosses on our breasts, for his sealing. So I am waiting, I am waiting.

¹ Bela Kun.

And, in accordance with the decree, Prokofii in due time produced his solitary towel.

"And have you no shirts as well, comrade?" one of the fellows asked. "Our minesweeper crews are badly needing shirts just now."

"I have only the one I am wearing," was Prokofii's nervous reply with a hand laid upon his heart. "And need you take my cross?"

This might have led the requisitioners to put him under arrest had not certain persons who knew Prokofii pronounced him to be mad. Then he went out to the beach and wandered along it until he reached the look-out station—singing all the while "God save the Tsar!" And that led to his being seized, felled to the ground, thrown into a cellar, and taken across the mountains, where shortly afterwards he died.

I stand looking at the masterless clay hut. In front of it are a few odds and ends of the very shoe-leather upon which Prokofii had been working. And in the adjacent byre there is only emptiness, for the family long ago sold the last of their livestock in the shape of their pigs, and "One-Leg" alone remains to please the children. At the moment two of those children, little girls, are engaged in trailing chips of wood about with strings and playing "steamboats," whilst the third, a boy, can be seen flourishing a dried bone from a window.

My chief desire, though, is to see Tania. And behold she is before me! But where can she be going to in this wind, a wind fit almost to blow the peaks off the mountains? At all events she is standing on the threshold with an evident intention of setting forth!

"Good day," she says. "I am just off for the mountains with some wine."

She has her shoulders swathed in an under-jacket, her head covered with a calico hood tilted awry, her back laden with a towel-wrapped, pood-heavy keg, and her breast slung about with four rag-encased bottles—the rags designed to guard their contents against breakage. Such her travelling outfit!

I know her phrase "across the mountains." It means that,

though laden with all that wine, she is going to climb to the snow-heaped Pass, to toil through it, and to proceed perhaps some fifty versts farther—negotiating as she does so great forests, ravine bridges which motor-cars cannot cross, and all the region where travellers stand liable to be brought to a halt, where Reds and Greens alike may be met with, where there are dangling from poles beside an iron bridge the bodies of seven men whose identity is unknown, even as is that of their executioners, where documents are scanned and pockets searched. "A Communist?" The traveller is led away into the forest. "A Green?" The traveller is buried where he falls. "A tradesman?" The traveller must pay a toll before he can proceed farther. In that region there is a constant tearing and biting of human wolves. It is a region of rocks to which the never-ending warfare of the Iron Age has returned.

And the frail Tania is about to make her way thither! And arrived there she will walk day and night without ever lying down, or halting even to rest, but ceaselessly moving onward with liquor whence the profits may amount to, say, five pounds of grain or meal. And even when she has returned home she will not have spent three days there before she will have reshoulderded her keg and again betaken herself across the mountains."

"Yes, it is hard work, but there are the children to think of. Five times have I made the journey. This will be the sixth. And certainly I never fall asleep at home but I dream that again I am walking and walking through the mountain forests with this wine on my back. My feet are beginning to hurt me, too, but I daresay I shall be able to pick up something in the way of shoes. Well, come in and have a bit to eat."

Like many other good souls, she used to live by taking in visitors' washing. And by that means she brought up her children well and never let them go unfed. And meanwhile her husband, Prokofii the shoemaker, read the Bible and awaited Truth's advent. And when at last Truth arrived it launched an avalanche upon him. . . .

"And do you never get insulted as you travel?"

"I used to. Men would come running out of the forest and

say to me—for I suppose I still looked young, 'Come back with us into the forest and live with us there. But I would reply that I had children to attend to and could not stay. And then the men would laugh, and give me a bit of bread. Fortunately they have always been decent men, men themselves knowing what suffering can be, that I have fallen in with."

"Greens—some of those who refuse to surrender?"

"I could not say," is her rather nervous reply. "At all events, once when one of them gave me a bit of lard, he said just, 'For your children. I too have children.' Once, though, I was just approaching a little town when some men came and took all my wine away, though I could scarcely stand on my feet! 'Don't say anything!' they cried. 'We believe that you are a speculator.'¹ So that time I had to return cold and hungry, and could scarcely reach home at all. Only Heaven, in its mercy, brought it about that the Tartars let me have a fresh supply on credit." . . .

Men and beasts are very much alike. Both of them have human personalities, and fight and sport and weep. And both are come from the rocks. And both to the rocks return. But Tania cares nought for rock or forest or storm. The only thing that she fears is the risk of one day being carried off to a remote fastness, made a mock of, forced to see her wine drunk and body debauched, and then curtly dismissed with the words, "Off now, woman! Away with you!"

"Sometimes I make the men bread, and they eat it, and watch for me to come again."

Once that garden of hers had marrow-plants flowering in it and pigeons cooing and a sewing-machine clicking. And once, dressed in her best attire, she would walk to mass with Prokofii—he carrying their son and heir and she leading their little girls by the hand. . . .

"But always I am afraid of breaking down. And in any case it is only trying to cheat Fortune. If some help doesn't come from somewhere, all of us will be dead soon."

Once she had a delicate nose, blue eyes and a kindly mien—was quite a comely woman; but now she is a mere skeleton.

¹ *Anglice*, profiteer.

And both she and the children are larger of eye than they ought to be. And all the time, it seems, they could be saved if only she would accept the addresses of a bull-necked sailor who looks at her. Well, if such a fellow can spell rescue, why should she not avail herself of it, now that all else has become smoke and dust?

"Well, I must say good-bye. Here is some bread for you in a paper. Christ go with us! A neighbour will see to things whilst I am away."

"Good-bye, O good and true woman!"

As I am moving away one of the little girls calls my attention to her chip of wood.

"Look at my 'te-e-eanboat!" she says. "Oo-oo-oo!"

So Tania is gone. As I glance at Chatyr Dagħ I perceive the mountain now to be absolutely clear of mist, though mantled with snow. As Tania scales its sides with her keg of liquor it will make her catch at her breath and look at the eagles soaring over her and listen to the wine bubbling out its song.

BLOWN BY THE WIND

IN front of me is the doctor's almond orchard. Well, this is my last round of the neighbourhood—I shall not be in these lower parts again until winter has come and gone; so I will seek out the doctor and bid him farewell. Ordinarily these lower parts do not concern me. I find it easier to remain squatted on my hill.

The twigs lash my face, the wind howls and shrieks, the sea is a vista of blue. Viewed through the trees, its foaming eddies seem to be playing a game of bo-peep with me. Then, white before my vision, the doctor's villa shows up. Once more its ancient stumps confront me like the beams of a fortress designed to last for centuries. Once more I see the conduits which used to catch the winter rains and hold them ice-cold even through the hottest summer. Well, the doctor sold that fortress some time ago, before retiring into a sort of slat-roofed coffin of a place instead.

Then next I behold the doctor himself, standing before his new abode with arms outstretched and rags wind-fluttered, as though he were serving for a scarecrow.

"The gale has blown me to you," I say, "so let me bid you farewell before the winter."

"Quite so," he replies good humouredly, but with jellyish features still staring upward. "As you see, I am engaged in testing my eyesight. Yesterday I could distinguish things quite clearly, but to-day not even a tree bole is visible."

"Perhaps they have been blown away by the wind?"

"Ah—you might think so, but as a matter of fact I cannot see even the branches. Perhaps it is because daily for the past ten days I have been consuming a bitter almond. But I have just cried to myself, 'Hold! Enough!' And wherefore? Because I felt that I had not the necessary strength of mind to continue the course. A fear came over me lest I should lose

my eyesight before I had altogether completed my writing. As a matter of fact, though, the last chapters of my book, the chapters which were to have treated of 'The Russian Intelligentsia's Apotheosis,' will never now be written, even though my sense of hearing still remains acute . . . Oh, but yesterday a colleague of mine who is in the habit of putting patties of his own making down his throat at the same rate (one per diem) as my bitter almonds brought me one of those confections. And the result was that I became seized with such a pain inside that I had to resort to opium for a remedy. Well, the opium sent me off to sleep. And in that sleep I saw again, just before dawn—*her*, Natalia Semenova! . . . She laid her head upon my shoulder, and said, 'Soon now, Misha.' . . . Yes, I know that it will be soon. She always was right in what she said. And it shows that, over there, there really does exist a world in which consciousness survives. How one longs and longs for that world! . . . Yes, and the opium brought back to me other things as well—though I have forgotten them now. And how happy I was during my two hours of that condition!—Oh, there was 'Uncle,' though! *I can* remember him."

"'Uncle'? I do not understand, doctor."

"Well, probably you believe me to be joking, but I am not. This 'Uncle' of mine was a being scarcely to be numbered with humanity, that is to say with you and me, at all. Yet the way that he had with him, the air of being a steady old fellow! And oh, his venerable beard and his characteristically earthy smell and his carpet bag! True, the bag was a trifle worn and faded, but never was it without 'Uncle's' account books, and a pinch of incense which he had brought home from a pilgrimage, and some little crosses given him by the Reverend Father, and a drop of holy water, and a nice little consecrated scourge."

"Doctor, the drift of your remarks escapes me."

"In other words, then, you mean to say that my talk is all opium and bitter almond?" And the doctor quizzically knits his brows. "Well, what I really mean by 'Uncle' is Russia's present-day Intelligentsia. The Intelligentsia knows but two poles—there exist for it only a 'north pole' and a 'south pole'—No. Stay where you are. Never mind the wind. It will not

hurt us. It could not possibly do so—Well, the Intelligentsia call their 'northern pole' 'spiritual uplift,' and it is a pole made of sugar candy, and the pole sought for principally by those of the Intelligentsia who, whilst going from one mental bankruptcy to another, and wasting their whole spiritual substance, and falling into voluptuous decadence, nevertheless delight in that decadence, and serve it up to us with different sauces, despite that corruption, no matter what its disguise, can never, never impart nourishment. And the Intelligentsia's other pole is the 'flesh'—the 'flesh,' palpitating and most foul, which they disguise, as they do the first, with different perfumed sauces. That pole, indeed, is the pole of Russia's present rulers, of all her tearers and eaters of carrion, of all the creatures which should be dealt with by the Sanitary Department, but keep shouting 'Down with this!' or 'Let us devour that!' and then proceed to devour it to the sound of a brass band and a big drum, and in public, and even before the whole universe if it can so be managed. And between those two poles there oscillates a 'peg' or clot of skimmed milk which has now gone sour—What? That 'Uncle' of mine are you asking about? Oh, he was one in a thousand! Neither here nor elsewhere did such a relative ever exist before. 'Wait a moment, my boy,' he would say. 'First let me give you a hot bath, and brush your hair, and vest you in a clean shirt, and hang upon you a little cross given me by His Reverence, and hand you a primer to read, and fit you out with a little scourge.' For he was a tough old gentleman indeed, a clot of milk calculated to sour every bit of crockery in the place. But I see that even yet you do not understand me. A-a-ah! How I should have liked to have developed that formula of his into a twenty-volumed work with historical and other commentaries complete! But sometimes a 'Cousin' used to take 'Uncle's' place, though a 'Cousin' of moral recipes more of the preservative, quick-silver-treatment order than 'Uncle's.' Only 'Uncle' could go straight from absolving and administering Extreme Unction to a dying woman to lolling in the boudoir of Madame Angot whilst she was at her morning toilet, and thence to paying the 'Cousin' a visit, and thence to taking his

usual remedies against dyspepsia, and thence to playing at verse-writing, and thence to disporting himself at his club, where he always had friends waiting to hear of his 'exploits.' In the result his boots were for ever being worn out. Ah, but he *was* an uncle! A favourite saying of his was that there was sorrow coming upon the world, and that perhaps it had arrived already, and that in any case he knew just where its foot would fall. And that was why he kept everything ready against it in his carpet bag, down to a little notebook of such jottings as 'Gave two kopeks to a beggar in a church porch,' whereas the 'Cousin' affected the shirt-cuff for his entries, and indited upon it such items as 'Gave the *maitre d'hôtel* at Palermo five —', and so left undivulged precisely what he had disbursed."

Here the doctor retests his eyesight with the aid of the tree boles.

"Weaker," he comments. "Do you know, last night some fellows went through my villa there, though they had to smash in a stout oaken door to get into the place! And as it happens that the villa's windows are three *arshini* high—surely this must have been a building prevision of mine?—I was enabled to watch the gang as it worked away with crowbar and jemmy. Yes, that is what comes of the new culture. First they gave a few tugs at the front part of my sideboard. Then the stanchions at the back of it gave way with a c-c-crack! Then the brutes smashed in the frontwork boarding—and that was the end of my glass-panelled piece of property."

As he speaks the wind makes him pant and bend forward. Yet he will neither stir from the spot nor invite me to come indoors. At length, therefore, I suggest our at least standing behind a tree to avoid the wind.

"Of course, in these days abstract questions are fatiguing. Yet for all that one cannot dispense with them entirely. Also a few generalisations are inevitable if we are to add up the items and attempt a computation of totals. Items, however, always enable one or another conclusion to be drawn. One item is that yesterday our seventeenth local resident expired of starvation. And another item is that three days ago they shot twelve ex-officers in Alupka for having dared to return from

Bulgaria to the families for which their hearts yearned, for having dared to take passage back to their own country on a Turkish feluga. It happened that I saw them on their way to pay the penalty, and saw riding with them on the motor-lorry a man like a poet, a man with a shock of hair as black as a raven's wing, a man whose eyes were dreamy with (presumably) spiritual ecstasy, a man with the general air of a god ordering his menials about from a cloud canopy. For that same man had just given orders to his menials to slaughter twelve Russian heroes for having returned to their own land. Wait a minute, though." And the doctor, approaching closer, clutches my hand in his. "Surely we can discount some of this business? Not *all* of us are dead yet. And even when we are, life will go on as before—and not the less but the more so for this orgy of slayings. Indeed, it may even be that life's essence lies in these slayings, and that the 'functioning' of life will be helped, not hindered, by the persistent telephonings of 'Shall I kill?' 'Yes, kill.' 'We need food.' 'Then away with you!' And in that case departure may be no more than our proper part in the 'functioning.'"

"But what about hope, doctor, and an ultimate reckoning?"

"'Functioning' I am speaking of—not hope. What hope can there be? And as for an ultimate reckoning, it must follow upon and confirm the 'functioning.' For the time being, therefore, we can but say '*Merci beaucoup!*' to everything. It is an order of things which I might call 'constitutional putrefaction.' You know, I presume, what gasoidal gangrene is? And you know, I presume, its hissing sound? Well, you can hear that hissing now.—By the way, why were you not present at the 'meeting' last night? I beg of you to be more careful, or you too may be sent to meet death. In proof of which let me hand you this."

And the doctor thrusts a hand into a fold in his rags and draws thence a red-tinted leaflet which hangs fluttering in the breeze.

"No! Do not tear it up. Presently I will send it on its way myself. But read what it says. 'Henceforth all persons are to attend meetings on pain of denunciation to a judge of the

Revolutionary Tribunal.' Well, I do not say that that is not necessary if proper 'functioning' is to ensue. The reason why *I* attended the meeting was the fact that there was to be present at it a real, live high maestro of 'functioning' in the person of 'Comrade' Deriaba. And the meeting's first item was that a young jackanapes from the Putilov Ironworks gave our professors a rousing-up and then rubbed the noses of our school-teachers for them. And meanwhile we smiled as pleasantly as we could. Then Deriaba had *his* smile. All of us, it seemed, were his 'good fellows'; but also, it seemed, it was proper for the whole of the Intelligentsia to attend those meetings, and not merely a section of that body—presumably because we Intellectuals have a special love for Golgotha, and our tastes in that respect have been consulted! Oh, psychologists indeed, those Centre-fellows are! They know the organism of the Intelligentsia to its every tissue. Hence from now onwards one is to attend every meeting even if one has got the toothache, or a cold, or whooping cough, or the influenza. Yes, that is to be so, and for that matter will be so, despite that when summoned to the war they might defend themselves and others from Deriaba's crew, the Intelligentsia.—Well, as I was saying, everyone henceforth is to attend every meeting, and to attend it punctually and punctiliously, and there to have the lash laid across him. And some of us will turn up in rags (though spectacted, of course), and others in a collar designed at once to save their sense of dignity and to voice a tacit protest. And so, shoeless and submissive, but collar-ed, both doctors and school-teachers and artists will assume a comical facial independence combined with a quivering of lip and a tightening of gaze, and proceed at once to simulate enthusiasm for Communism and very really to evince pride in a sense of being servitors of the liberal arts. Let one of them even cough, and he will do it theatrically, with the 'parlour splutter' known to stage circles, yet all the while be quaking in his shoes, half-dead with terror. And 'Comrade' Deriaba? Oh, *he* will be wearing his beaver hat and fox-fur wrap *à la* Pugachev."

"But his cloak is made of *skunk*?"

"Possibly he has one made of that, but the garment which he will be wearing on *these* occasions will be a fox affair. And what a figure he always cuts! Undoubtedly he has once been a butcher, or else a member of a troupe of wrestlers, or else one of those flat-faced, high-cheek-boned Cossack non-commissioned officers whom you see walking about the grain-growing villages. Oh, you should have heard him as he laid his revolver upon the table and proceeded to hold forth upon popular enlightenment! *How* he talked and *how* he quacked—all the stuff that his sort of riff-raff never fail to chatter on the subject—'the People's blood and sweat,' and the rest, though he and his mates have done their best to kill off our every educated citizen! 'I call upon you Intellectuals,' the fellow cried, 'to open your brains and show them to the Proletariat. Otherwise they shall be opened with a revolver and your bodies tumbled into the grave. Now, shall we have to scatter those brains of yours about or shall we not? We have waited for our victory a long time, and now the Government bids you bring enlightenment to the masses.' Yes—this to *us*, after all our magic-lanterns, after all our lectures to the people on the Samoyedes' mode of life, and upon the manner in which the free citizens of America celebrate their holidays by resting from work and amusing themselves, and so forth! Yes, actually this was said to folk who for years past have been whispering into the people's ear from behind the wainscot and tramping eighteen versts through the mud with cargoes of popular knowledge! One might have thought that we had categorically declined to 'function,' to judge by the way that now we were being told that, if the people were to be guided, our brains were required for the job! However, the 'shaking-up' over, the Intellectuals present expressed their willingness to comply, and coughed with what I might call an 'intonation,' and in some cases stuttered as they came forward—a wretched little doctor called Shulatov making himself especially prominent, and even going so far as to say that he considered the proposal 'well-conceived,' since 'above all it will leave us our independence.' 'Yes,' he cried, 'the popular soul is awakening, a ferment is in progress. Let us Intellectuals then put aside for a

while our disputings on good and bad reflexes and devote ourselves to the spadework which has become our manifest duty.' Finally, and to cap it all, this precious doctor ran up to 'Comrade' Deriaba and shook him by the hand! Why, what could such conduct mean? Was it sheer baseness or was it a burst of 'magnanimous remorse'? Are we to dabble in slop-water? 'Yes,' some say, 'and bide our time in the meanwhile. To bring ourselves now to bow the knee to fatuity may not gain us eventual victory, but pending that may lead the people to become convinced of our devotion to their interests. True, the people have turnips for heads; but for that very reason it will be all the easier to say to any restive, captious turnip, 'Forbear—wait,' whilst we ourselves meanwhile enjoy the pleasures of martyrdom. And in any case, as there is rottenness surrounding us on every side, how can dabbling in slop-water for a while really hurt us?' So now we have come to it that Prometheus is to figure as a knave undergoing an unselfish, altruistic martyrdom in a manure-splashed Golgotha! Well, if any man wishes to join the beasts, I say to him, 'Go.' But *I* will not."

Here the doctor releases the red leaflet from his grasp and watches it as, soaring like a red butterfly, it whirls away seaward.

"Do not rush off yet," he continues. "I have not yet put my chief point to you. One thought leads to the brain being sharpened to receive another just as successive mice can nibble an edge fine. Would you leave me merely to talk to the soil? That ordinarily is all that I have to talk to, for my fellow human beings are becoming chary of opening their mouths, and soon will have become chary even of thinking. I had an idea of bequeathing them a certain packet of edifying literature, but since have decided that such Moors of the desert would never understand it—that it had better go to such of our present rulers as dabble in journalism (everything now, in fact, even the blood-letting, is done 'journalistically'). And for that matter it would be an interesting experience to catch one of those ruler-journalists *chez soi* and so absolutely alone, as he sat and masticated his dinner, that his belly

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rumblings alone would break the silence. One can imagine him saying privately to himself, 'Are we present lords of the land wolves or are we rather boa-constrictors?' Yes, if fellows of the sort really are human of aspect, they must feel, as they come face to face with a mirror and in solitude see themselves as they are, that they could almost spit upon themselves, and fain would find reassurance in the usual speechifying phrases—'In the name of this,' and 'In the name of that,' and so forth. Yes, solitary reflections of the sort might be said to constitute the 'smoking-jacket' of each such ruler, a jacket made by his 'people's tailor' for his private hours. For the same reason, for the reason that such rulers are what they are, who can blame them for battenning upon human flesh when they are constantly having good Russian heads flung to them? And for all that they besprinkle and besprinkle us with words as with showers of red sand, never mind—one day there will come the requital, one day there will be meted out the reckoning. And the requital will prove to be a requital reaching even to the seventh generation. Yes, a vision has shown me that that will be so. Shadows moved in that vision, but they were shadows of sure foreboding. Oh, and do you know, yesterday I was walking across the town bridge when three Red soldiers in riding-breeches overtook me. And, being of course scornful of ancient Rus, with her baste tailorings, they made fun of my get-up even to its pince-nez, and for all that I said nothing, emitted animal-like guffaws which poisoned the very air about them. It is said that man alone of the beasts can attain to visible contortions of the countenance: but *they* attained to them, brute beasts though they were. If eventually such beasts contrive to avoid dying of themselves and their grossness it will be a marvel. And if *they* are such, what of their superiors? Well, those superiors have corrupted our national speech, depraved our national soul and defiled our national everything, yet still are being greeted by the outer world with 'Let us be friends'! Yes, and actually that 'friendship' is in some cases coming about, and soon will be a *fait accompli*! To think that men should believe this vileness here to have in it the seeds of world-redemption!

The only explanation can be that men believe regeneration through corruption to be possible. So they cry of these fellows of ours, 'They are by right Russia's new depositaries of power'! Oh, what Francises of Assisi, then, those depositaries must be! See how they can weep as they convert the old depositaries into soup and consume them! See how even in pleasure there is involved an element of suffering! What a prostitution of language!—Oh, but you needn't be going yet, surely?"

I move away, but the doctor accompanies me and arrests my progress again as we reach his ruined water-tank.

"Here the wind is less," he continues. "I will not invite you to visit my tomb. I will merely inform you that I am getting ready for it—seeing to my papers and what not. Oh, and do you know, yesterday I was reading about Captain Cook and his savages. And as I did so I shed tears (though that also may have come of the fact that my stomach was still aching from my colleague's pasty). For oh, those dear and pure-souled savages! To think of their entertaining Cook with human flesh as benevolently as bears, and serving him with crocodile on a lordly dish!—Do not the mountains there look absolutely things of holiness and innocence? 'O mountains, fall upon us! O hills, cover us!'—Yes, I *shall* regret leaving them. But before doing so I shall take a last walk through these gardens and look at every tree and take leave of everything. The one distasteful circumstance will be that I shall have to do all that amid a setting of corpses that have been kicking about for weeks past. And what a flat, badly kept, wind-exposed place that burial-ground is! And to think that before long this very hand of mine which I hold out will be being gnawed by dogs!"

"But surely all that is only so much 'chemistry'?"

"It is more than that, for æsthetics too have a value, even though an artist acquaintance of mine has told me how once he had to leave them out altogether. The reason why he had to leave them out was as follows. On being ordered officially to paint an official series of anti-exanthematic placards (to the end that the proletariat might have an even improved

knowledge of the outward aspect of lice), he duly limmed two very realistic designs for the series, and thereby earned a pound of bread! But as he was taking the pound home it came over him that he must give away the pound to some passing children. 'I cannot!' he cried. 'I *will* not eat bread thus earned. No, say nothing, but take the bread.'—Oh, look at that sea! Only look at it! 'Regard its shimmer, observe its sheen' (I have been reading Gogol recently). And what other things of beauty once were here!—How I wish that I was on a steamer in the Indian Ocean and about to put in to some Ceylonese port where I could hide myself in the tall jungle, lie *perdu* in places where calm temples raise somnolent pinnacles above dozing verdure and a huge Buddha in stone might be looming green and misty as ants overran him, and birds of paradise perched upon his shoulder and great ears and chirruped to him their confidences! But most of all would there have to be a neighbouring streamlet gurgling as 'The Ancient of Days' contemplated the scene with elongated, dispassionate eyes. You must remember that I have seen the whole setting in pictures and derived thence a feeling that, though Buddha says nothing, he knows *everything*, and that, whilst contemning the foul and the worthless and the kopek-cheap, and caring nought even for the puissance of the Four-Tailed, and nought even for our own 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' with its air-poisoning rant, he knows—well, as I say, knows *everything*, and even if I were to go and confront him with every book that ever I have read piled upon my cranium alongside of every particle of flour that ever I have eaten, would still understand why I was doing that, and with hands placed *so* merely say in a casual tone, 'Well, how are things going? Has all your cogitating gained you much?' But the question, of course, would be asked with his eyes only, not with his mouth, and without his stirring so much as an eyelash—as would be proper to a deity omnipotent of wisdom and prevision. Well, there is nothing strange in my going in for these imaginings. In these days nothing whatsoever is strange. And I say at once that I would gladly become one with Buddha, gladly become part of the Rock of Wisdom. And for

my personality to become permeated with his, and for my personality to attain the Buddhist essence, no more than half an hour would be required, in that already I say prayers to the mountains' in their Buddha-like purity. And if it could be that once more I was doing my first planting of my almond orchard, I should take also to praying to an almond god, in that I feel sure that the almond-tree possesses such a deity, even as there must be deities of the soil and of the poultry-yard, and so forth—all of course sprung from *His* bosom. . . . Yes, ever I pray that it may be beside His footstool that I may end my days—that as I go hence my eyes may be resting upon Him and my soul departing in peace. And peradventure when gone hence we may at last comprehend the mystery—and accept it. Ah, well I can understand peoples' worship of fire! From God does fire come and to God does fire go. And the wind is His breath."

And the doctor makes a gesture as of embracing the rushing air and then releasing it.

"For though it is but atmosphere borne hither from Chatyr Dagh, it is atmosphere pure and clean, and comes to one in these days like a friend. Last night, on my roof, it sang to me songs the hours through, and I replied to it, 'Hail, friend true and trusty! So you are letting me hear your voice once more? You have not entirely forgotten the old man?' . . . Ah—that slops business of which I was speaking to you. I shall be dead soon, but I shall go to my death without having accepted it. As a matter of fact I shall no sooner be gone than men will arrive to wrench the doors out of my villa. Already they have removed the copper and a couple of window-frames. They did that last night, and I heard them at it. They are the same fellows as keep making off with other people's cows and carrying on with wenches under my very almond-stumps. Yes, they bring a gramophone with them, and with each fresh cork drawn bawl 'The Lady.' I have to endure that 'Lady' nightly. The moment when the horrible, high-waisted female first turns up is always the moment when with an intense effort I have settled myself to my work and the pain has died down. But the superlatively disgusting feature about

it all is that to fellows like those nothing whatsoever is disgusting. Well, for that matter, can one really expect a bacillus to feel disgusted when it has become submerged in human blood? For to it, of course, a position of that sort is bliss unalloyed and leads it first to duplicate itself, and then to quadruple itself, and so to spread its virus all over, and to remultiply itself in that virus until all the child's young body succumbs to the convulsions of malignant meningitis, and he cries, 'Papa! Mamma! I am dying! Everything has gone dark! Where are you? Where are you?' Which means that the bacillus has reached the heart and taken up its abode in the brain's holy of holies, and there fallen to dancing a can-can to the tune of 'The Lady.' Verily that bacillus might have ridden into the brain in a motor-car! And why not? For may not even bacilli possess auto's fitted with all the latest improvements? These are the kind of things which I picture at night. And the spectacle almost sets my skull on fire. Had not the present times come to be what they are, I should never have believed what pictures could be vouchsafed to one amid a setting solely of deadly hunger and misery. Assuredly their source must be infusion of bitter almond. And those men—what is *their* source? Why, they are just human bacilli—just that. . . . But where now is the Great Shepherd? Where our heroes, and our sages, and our ascetics? Why are they gone from us? No word comes back from them. They— No, do not *you* go from us. Wait a moment until I have shown you one more instance of brutality, one more symbol of the present order."

He moves towards the water-tank which flanks the little coach-house of his villa (as a matter of fact, he has two water-tanks—one originally designed for summer use, and the other for winter), and beckons to me with a mysterious finger.

"Already you were aware, of course, that my water store used to be particularly distinguished for its clarity and coldness? Well, look at it *now*! Look at it!"

He raises a trapdoor covered with worn felt and bids me bend down and peer within.

"Do you see that filth there? Look at it for yourself."

And my eyes do indeed discern a layer of slime floating on the water's surface.

"In it you behold yet another exploit of my neighbours from the look-out station, of the same fellows as sing to me 'The Lady.' Not long ago I lanced an abscess in one of the fellows' fingers. He repaid me by returning here with his mates and irretrievably befouling my water. But is it right that ape should defile ape's property after being benefited by ape? Unfortunately these ape droves have had the way pointed out to them by their leaders. The leaders really it is that have poisoned life."

"Now go indoors, doctor, or you will catch a chill."

"No, I shall not. Nor can I rest indoors in the daytime, but only at night-time, after that I have set the little stove going and sat myself down to read. In the daytime I prefer to walk about."

And he waves me a last salute. . . . Nor did we ever meet again.

ON THE LOWER LEVEL

AGAIN the wind drives me until I find myself near "Krasnaia Gorka." Once that establishment was a boarding-house surrounded with trees planted by writers of note. Now all those trees have been cut down. Always, when there, I am haunted with Chekhov's phrase, "A jewel-studded firmament." And how would Chekhov's sensitive soul be feeling now if he had been alive? How would *it* have supported the present existence?

Next I sight "The Villa Rose." There too there is desolation. All the hedge encircling its grounds is dead and the array of sunflowers beside its wind-swept carriage-way gone—been thrown into the sea nearby to perish. Here on the coast-road the water's level expanse looks smoother than it did from higher up. The looming offing alone is black with the gale. And my route lies along that road of loneliness. Presently I pass something that is burning. Then I pass some broken-down, hacked-about conservatories whose woodwork still has fluttering on it some fragments of "Official Orders," and I read, "Shot . . . Shot . . . Without trial . . . Then and there . . . By order of the Revolutionary Tribunal." . . . Nor is a soul in sight—not even one of *them*. Stay, though! there *is* a soul in sight. He is a red-starred fellow who, straddling a pair of knock-kneed legs near the old boundary toll-house, is idly playing with the building's door-latch.

Then I go farther, with the wind whirling and sporting about me and making a wayside hoarding rattle and the telegraph-poles sing. And so by the lonely road to the vacant plot of the ramshackle rotunda. There too there is emptiness, with only the wind lifting up its voice in the building itself. Then, to avoid having to pass the Church House and its barbed wire, a place in whose cellars souls are still alive and palpitating, I make a *détour*, and whilst doing so come upon a

throng of old folk and children who are busily raking over remnants left by the "eaters of men" for saveloy skins, mutton-bones, heads of herrings and peelings of potatoes.

As I approach the group my notice is caught by one tall old man in particular who, with a piece of druggut over his head and shoulders, is also armed with a basket and a long stick.

It is, it is—why, it is Ivan Mikhailitch!

"Oh, my very dear sir!" he exclaims, with the tears gushing from his poor fading, miserable old eyes. "See how I have to collect bits for myself! True, if bread is being cut up in a Tartar bakehouse, and any scraps fall to the floor, I can gather a handful or two of them and soak them in hot water and have 'soup'; but the difficulty is first to heat the water. For the purpose I am at present using a cupboard, but that cupboard is my last morsel of fuel: and though also I have four fine boxes filled with my Lomonosov materials and with card-index notes for a history of our language, I would rather not put those boxes to such a use, seeing that the history may prove to be my closing work. However, I am busily preparing the history's plan and doing four hours' work every day after daybreak. The trouble is that I am growing weaker. Of course, there are times when I apply to the Soviet Cookery for food, but the cooks only sneer at me or give me merely soup and no bread. Besides, though some friends of mine, schoolmasters, had promised me a little flour, they find now that they have none for themselves."

On that exposed road, as we stand together thus, the wind is making the very ruts at our feet sough.

"Oh, that I could go back to my own part of the country, to my own province of Vologda! I have a sister there still, and she used to have a cow, so that if I had stayed there I might still have been having milk and buttermilk and butter and curd." The words come forth with a quavering and a choking sound, and he wraps himself up more closely from the wind. "And what would I not give now for a hot bath and a scrubbing with a birch-brush! How I should sit in that bath and steam myself! Not for three months past have I had a wash

and a grooming, for I am too weak now to do such things for myself. And how this wind blows! It is nearly taking me off my legs. . . . *They* have seized everything that I had at Orel—my library, my home and some capital which I earned with my books. Now, when I die, Lomonosov will go to rack and ruin and all my materials for him be lost! And when I wrote to the local commissars about it they said that it was 'no affair of theirs.' Oh, dear sir, we are in Hell! I would far rather those sailors had drowned me."

And when he has said that I go upon my way.

No one is to be seen even when I enter the dying little town. One would think at first that the wind had flogged everyone out of it. But presently I hear someone or something approaching me, and a smart little donkey and cart come into sight. The animal, bedecked with red rosettes and tinkling bells, is well-fed and has his ears pricked as he trots along, and the cart to which he is harnessed is painted a gay yellow and has rubber tyres. And in that cart, lo and behold a lady is seated—yes, a fine lady in a grey costume, kid gloves and a blue hood! And her air as she drives is solely one of cool assurance. Wonderful that still there should be left any well-dressed, carriage-driving dames! Then not everything has yet been turned into chaos. No, in addition to the wreckage of barques and boats and barges, there still exist dainty yachts moored in quiet havens, safeguarded from rocks and the breakers' turmoil. . . . And the donkey's rhythmical tread dies away with a chok-chok-chok-a-chok-chok.

And so at last to my destination, which is a Tartar mansion seventeen times looted and ransacked, and now deprived of its all—of its silver and gold and precious stones, with embossed silver mountings of the same; of its antique saddles, armour and *nagaiki*¹; of its wheat and hay in ricks; of its tobacco and its bags of Grecian nuts; of its silken cushions; of its huge feather-beds covered with Circassian goatskin; of its Persian silk hangings embroidered with gilt arabesques and golden acorns; of its tablecloths of green and gold; of its Circassian veils patterned in squares and with openwork; of its girdles

¹ Cossack whips.

of gilt and shell design; of its strung sequins and turquoises; of its Damascene-ware and ware of Bagdad and Batchi-Serai; of its turquoise-mounted poniards, and poniards mounted with jasper and carved ivory; of its pot-bellied and slender-necked pitchers of Arabian copper; and of its Circassian cooking-pots. Yes, all that this once wealthy Tartar mansion contained, all its many things of the sort which every rich Tartar loves to amass and keep, have melted, melted away into some omnivorous cranny or gone to sail the seas, or found themselves homes abroad on wall or on shelf or in shop-window. Some of that wealth, for example, may be in Moscow, or in Petrograd, as furnishings for the sumptuous apartments of one of our new dispensers of Russian life. Other portions of it may be in London or in Paris, which never fails to appreciate finery, or even in far-off San Francisco. For this once brilliant-hued Russian bird has had its plumage plucked and dispersed to the winds, and the more so because in these days Russian articles of the kind find a market as readily as Russian human beings find tombs.—Stay, though! There are Russian human beings who cannot find even *that*!

The master of the household, an elderly Tartar, has just come in from the mosque. Yellow of skin he is and possessed of the cavernous eyes of a mountain-eagle. For a while, after he has seated himself, we say nothing. Then:

“One can hear winter coming in this wind. Aye, it is right upon us. And that is bad.”

“And that is bad.”

“And everywhere our Tartar folk are dying. And that also is bad.”

“And that also is bad.”

“And I have not a single pear left, nor any maize, nor any nuts, nor any flour. And that, too, is bad.”

“Yes—and that, too, is bad.”

“And my last melon has been stolen, and the other day my son Memet had the misfortune to be lightened of two sackfuls of meal when crossing the mountains. And that, too, is bad.”

“And that, too—yes, certainly—is bad.”

Wherefore I depart with my sack still empty.

As I enter upon the long ascent homeward the mountains, lately small, begin to look big again. And inasmuch as the climb has to be accomplished step by step and rock by rock (for the wind keeps beating me backward), it is long before I attain the white road to Yalta. Just as I do so I see a dust-cloud whirling in my direction and catch the humming of a motor-car—no, of two. And then I sight the red blur of a Persian sheepskin cap, and behind it the bluish blur of a Russian cap of felt. Ah, it is *they* again! . . . They pass, and when they have done so I see a machine-gun levelling back at me its muzzle from a tripod. And doubtless there are with it revolvers and bombs. Those men, I know, belong to the other side of the mountains and have been to Yalta to transact certain "business," that is to say, to decide the fate of the twelve ex-officers arrested for returning to their native country from Varna, and now are hastening homeward again before the wind. But as it happens their route will take them through the Pass, through a place full of menace for such personages. And the menace will not be less because, as I have just seen, the cars contain, in addition to a mop of hair as black as a raven's wing, two faces—the one thin, dreamy and effeminate-looking and the other swarthy and bloated with sun and wind and liquor, while their owners loll back against the cushions in the attitude of all-pervading self-importance which alone befits self-constituted executants of important functions.

And so I stand looking after the cars, listening to the wilderness's awakened echoes.

THE END OF BUBIK

For three days past a cold wind has blown, whistled across the land from Chatyr Dag. And in it there is something almost to awaken fear. For that matter fear is everywhere already, and especially at Gorka. For Marina Semenovna has lost her goat!

It was by night that the animal disappeared. And from dawn till eve on the following day did Marina and the schoolmistress scour ravine and vineyard and highway. And ever as they did so the wind sent flying their alarm cries of "Bubik! Bubik! Bubik!"

For against Bubik's removal the abattis had been useless, and the "carillon" of empty tins, and the careful watch, for the night's storm-wind had rendered every sound inaudible. Then were the sailors at the look-out post to blame for the occurrence, or had Bubik of himself broken out through alarm at the hurricane? If the former had been the case, to tackle the sailors would be useless, even if one could so much as get at them. For the Antonina Vaselievna who lived near the wheat cove had similarly lost her heifer and then very soon learnt of its whereabouts, since she had seen its hide drying in the sailors' forecourt, and therefore dared do nothing further—otherwise she might have got more than she had bargained for.

Later the schoolmistress halted beside my fence and said: "Yes, our only hope, Bubik, has been stolen, and my mother is simply prostrate with scouring the ravines. Yet it must have been our own Uncle Andrei that did it, or the goat would have bleated and we should have heard it, since neither of us sleeps heavily, and three times the hurricane had us out of bed. He must have committed the deed just before morning. Remember, it is three nights since he last slept at home, and

during that time, according to what he told us beforehand he was going to do, he has been travelling the steppe country on 'business.' But that tale was only meant to put us off our guard. I can see that now as clearly as daylight. So he has ruined us, absolutely ruined us. Besides, the deed wasn't only theft. It was child-murder as well."

So woe has come to "Tikhaia Pristan," and Vadik and Koldik are searching everywhere, with their shrill little voices crying "Bubik! De-e-ear Bubik! Sudar, Sudar, Sudar!" . . .

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Black night, with the wind tearing at the stars themselves and making them look agitated and tremulous against the profundity of their background. As for the sea, it has become level again and lies reflecting the stars like a great cold mirror. And whilst everyone else has put up bar and bolt and is lying trembling at the least sound (for who knows who next will have his place pillaged?), lulls in the storm allow muffled, beseeching cries of "Bubik! Bubik! Bubik!" to make themselves heard.

So at "Tikhaia Pristan" we go out into the black night, into the storm, into chaos, with the stars almost shaking with the wind, with the blasts rending the darkness with shrieks and whirling round our feet, and then departing to harry the clumps of "field roller," and those clumps' content of tiny, hidden animal life. And the tins slung before the byre are full of animation, and rattling and swaying and humming and whistling and hooting and beating against the stones, and the byre's rickety door is groaning on its rusty hinges, and the crippled villa is resounding to the slappings of the tempest and its iron roofwork clattering on its wind-strained stanchions. It is as though the sum of the sounds were the poignant, desolate cry of mortal agony from this devastated existence. In such a dreary spot and on such a wild night sounds of the kind are ill hearing, for they may admit dark forces into the soul and give entry to black chaos and death. On hearing such sounds beasts vent their dismay by howling. And what do men do? Oh, to stand and listen to the uproar is unnerving.

Indeed, will the shrieking of the wind ever cease? Hark to its "Vo-*ut*! Vo-*ut*!"¹

"Maybe Bubik has only crossed to the other side of the road to get shelter from the storm, and is just standing amongst the bushes."

"Sudar! Sudar!—Bubik! Bubik!"

"For my part, I believe he burst the door himself, for fear of the wind."

"I daresay he did, for he's very strong, and the hinges are all eaten away with rust. But at least, as you can see, the *lock* was left untouched."

"Then may Heaven preserve us! Oh, but he *must* be taking shelter from the wind somewhere—just browsing quietly." . . .

So once again Marina scoured ravine and high-road, but found not even a fragment of goat's wool or a drop of goat's blood or a pellet of goat's dung. Wherefore Bubik-Sudar must have absolutely and finally disappeared.

And the town and its neighbourhood began to talk of the Pribytkovs' loss of their goat, and the Reverend Father-deacon said in the bazaar:

"The very first moment that I saw and admired that animal I had a presentiment of this. And now my presentiment has come true. Indeed, how could they expect such an easily handled piece of capital to remain unmolested? It was such a sumptuous goat, you see. No such goat could be kept safe without taking it up to one's sleeping-room. And I have a foreboding that something else of the sort is about to happen."

And the Reverend Father proved to be right, for his own cow disappeared the same evening!

"Ah, Marina Semenovna foretold it!" he wailed. "Somehow the link between one earthly event and another must be known to her. Seldom do this world's affairs progress independently."

And he sought her out and pressed her hand.

"No, don't try to dissuade me," he said, "when I tell you that next spring I intend to move with my family to the steppes and live with the peasants there. To those peasants I shall say, 'Pray forget that I am a deacon, but just take us

¹ The *u* is pronounced as in the English word "use."

in.' And if the peasants should not receive us, then we will pass onward to Great Russia and try our luck *there*. Great Russia will be no stranger to me, for I hail from there, and its people are pure Russian. True, there are brigands there as well, but they live apart from the people, and the people are good and kindly folk. Once they get to like you, they will never let you come to grief in their midst. So I shall say, 'Come, brothers! All of us have to live upon this earth and to be nourished of bread and of God. And though I am a deacon, I am also quite a plain person, and shall never seek to hold my head high. Cannot we therefore dwell in unity as do the herbs of the field?'"

And gradually, being cheerful of soul, he regained his courage and once more feared neither fire or steel nor death, in that he was literally as a herb of the field and sprung of God, and bound to be delivered by the same.

And the result of that faith and kindness of heart and cheerfulness of soul was that speedily he had his cow restored to him, since she had merely wandered away for a time and been discovered in the forest by some good people and temporarily tied up.

"The Lord Himself has given me back what is mine," the deacon remarked.

But never did the Lord give Marina Semenovna back her Bubik, in spite of her searchings . . .

At last the gale subsided and Uncle Andrei returned "from the steppes," bringing with him a sack well laden with lard and barley and tripe as the proceeds of bartering operations.

Towards evening it was when he reappeared, and he seemed tired, and seated himself under a pear-tree to watch Marina Semenovna rounding up her ducks.

"Oh, Marina Semenovna," he said, "I am worn out! Yes, by God I am! Do you know, those steppes everywhere are strewn with skeletons? There are skeletons wherever you tread—of fallen horses, you know, with a skull here and a hoof and shoe there, and so on. And as for the people, why, the Lord help us, they are simply wasting away. Oh, and do you know, as I was coming back through the Pass I was

stopped by three men with rifles, and one of them said, 'Halt! What have you got there?' But as soon as they had looked my canvas suit over and dived into my sack and found my barley and lard and the rest, they said, 'Oh, we don't interfere with you and your like. We are Wrangelites. You can proceed.' And they spoke civilly, too, and capped it with a salute.—But how I suffered from the cold! I thought I should never get home again."

He spoke wearily, meditatively, and his bloated, yellow features looked ten years older than of late.

"Yes," said Marina Semenovna meaningly. "And now I have something to tell *you*. And what"—here she looked him straight in the eyes—"do you suppose it is?"

"What, indeed?" he replied, but with the words trembled a little and clutched at his sack, which the schoolmistress had been eyeing ever since his return.

"It is this. Five nights ago our Bubik was stolen."

"Was he? Oh, then it is a shame!—But he *can't* have been stolen,"—and terribly shaken by the news Uncle Andrei rose to his feet. "The Lord deliver us, but how could any rascal know that the goat was there at all? Oh, it has all come of your gossiping about the animal. *What* a business! The thief ought to be struck dead and eaten of worms like a dog.—But—but are you sure that you are speaking the truth?"

"Uncle Andrei" (as Marina Semenovna spoke she neither raised her voice nor ever let Uncle Andrei's shrinking eyes escape her own), "Uncle Andrei, I have also to tell you that I could make a good guess at the thief. I believe him to be yourself."

"Myself?—Why, I—— Well, may God strike me dead if what you say is the case! Haven't I been nearly a week scouring the steppes and half-perishing with cold and hunger? If I am the rascal, then—— Do you believe in God, Marina Semenovna?"

Here Uncle Andrei doffed his—rather the late police superintendent's—hat, the hat which he had found in the superintendent's attic. Then he crossed himself, and went on:

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"If I am the thief, may I be hanged—may dogs eat me without benefit of priest or shrift—may I lose both this world and the next—may my eyes drop out of their sockets—may the worms fasten upon me—may——"

"Well, Uncle Andrei, you *may* be hanged one day. And if so, you'll remember my words—they'll come back to you all right. And in any case the worms 'll soon have fastened upon you for eating my goat. Aye, even yet the goat 'll choke you—its lard alone will."

Andrei's reply to this was a shrug of the shoulders and a muttered, "You are insulting a poor man."

"Then why not look me in the face?—A-a-ah! Already the goat's lard has stuck in your throat and one day will choke you." Here her voice took on a more incisive note. "Then is it nothing to you that my grandchildren should come to a miserable end? Is it because they're nothing more than orphans, nothing more than just little ones of the Lord's own? Oh, if you don't choke of that goat there's no justice on earth. But the worms *will* be swallowing you soon. I can see that, smell that already. *And I say that before the first snow has ceased falling you'll have gone down their throats.*"

A shade passed over Uncle Andrei's features and his dull eyes and despondent gaze shifted themselves to the garden. Then hoarsely he said:

"One day all of us must be eaten of worms, as I've told you before. How can you bring yourself so to insult an old man? Oh, it's nothing, of course, that I've had my cows killed, and been forced to let my pig go for half its value, or that whilst on service in the war I was bitten by a poisonous louse! Things like those, of course, don't count. So just you go on insulting me. *You're* one of the gentry, whilst I and mine are just plain working-folk with dirty blood in our veins—people who ought to be exterminated.—All the same, if you hadn't been a female, I'd have knocked your head off."

"Would you, you filthy rag? Then take care that you don't get your own head sent flying, that I don't lay this spade about you! Do you think, you Cain, that I'm afraid of you? Why, I can see through you as clearly as daylight. It's *I* that

am of the working-folk, and I'm ready to beat the breath out of you where my own people are concerned. No, don't you try touching me, but get out of this straight away. The sight of such a murderer of souls is a bit more than I can bear."

And with that the garden lying calm under the eventide heard her say many other dreadful things to which the little ones stood listening open-eyed.

"Well," Uncle Andrei muttered as he went off to the late police superintendent's bed-chamber, "you shall pay for this before you've finished."

"Shall I?" Marina commented to her daughter. "Will *that* ragamuffin make me pay? Why, to-morrow won't see him get up at all, for unless he's given me back my goat first he'll be a dead man, and an unshriven one at that. All that he's been doing these three days past has been to loaf in the thickets with his Tartar friends."

"Yes—in 'the steppe country'!"

"Aye, and only the other day I dealt the cards again upon his black soul and looked into it as though it had been water, and saw that he had been hiding in Korbek all the time. Besides, there are others that have seen him there—in a café in the Korbek bazaar. So, does he think that I'm afraid of his coming and strangling me to-night? Why, for my kith and kin I'd shed the last drop of my blood. Besides, once you've shown such brutes as *him* the stick they never utter another word. Show them the stick and between their legs go their cowardly tails. Oh, a fine lot they are, to be sure! Let them eat all they can, and *whilst* they can. It's only wise of them to do so."

Thus the goat disappeared. And so next did Marina Semenovna's two drakes. And when they had gone Uncle Andrei came and said to her reproachfully:

"So you're saying, I hear, that I've eaten your drakes as well? Then say it if you like! Here now is a drake's head. I have just found it in the ravine, and a bit of duck's feather with it. So it must be there that the accursed rascal who took the bird dashed its brains out."

The next thing was a breakdown which laid Marina

Semenovna almost at death's door. My friend the doctor ran in when sent for, diagnosed the trouble as heart weakness, and by way of fee for his visit ate a morsel of stale crust and a stewed pear.

Thus the end of the goat. And *à propos* I reflected:

"What after all is such an occurrence when compared with a wholesale extinction of human beings? Here have a doctor and his wife been killed on the Sudak road and their money taken. Here have a schoolmaster and his wife been stabbed to death near Korbek. Here have a number of others been hacked to pieces outside that town. And here are yet others, many, many others, about to go the same way!" . . .

A LIVING SOUL

BABUGAN now is misty and sombre-looking and almost blotted out of existence behind drizzling rain. For the deluge of grey November has burst. The squirrels have sought timely retirement within their drays, the roads have become slippery and soft, and the foothills have exchanged their mantle of flowers for mourning. Yet one day the warmth will return to us again, and earth gladden our eyes with verdure.

And Tamarka is gratified by the change, for now, as she roams from morning till night, she has well-soaked branches to pluck at. And in spite of her exposure to the wind she somehow contrives to keep herself warm. In fact, her water-filled hoofmarks are everywhere, and so are the marks of her nibblings upon bole and bark. Thus she wanders about and maintains life in herself.

And we? We sit at home—sit with hands folded—sit like that from dusk to dawn. And oh, how long in coming dawn can be! One gazes into the fire as one sits there—watches visions materialise—listens to the rain's murmured pattering on the roof as again and again it repeats, "Darkness and desolation, darkness and desolation!"¹ whilst bell-like drippings into the tank under the scullery floor drone an accompaniment. Perhaps for a moment hunger will cease to torment and a doze will ensue; but almost at once a sudden flare-up in the little stove will reawaken one to thought and set one wondering if morning has come. As though of one's own wish one would think! As though one would not only too gladly leave thought dormant! Why, in that very bundle of lopped-off twigs there are stirring lopped-off memories. Oh, with closed eyes let me thrust, thrust, thrust it into the flames! One twig in particular I

¹ In the Russian the final syllable (*ta*) of the last word is prolonged and repeated in imitation of raindrops falling.

know to have come from the "serpent" in the Deep Ravine. Then into the fire with it!—And oh, that I had some tobacco for my beguilement! Tobacco might at least waft me to the sweet land of dreams.

But no. One can but sit by the stove and listen to that ever-recurring "Darkness and desolation, darkness and desolation!" . . .

Ah, but I seem to hear a knocking at the gates! Surely it cannot be the wind? . . . I strain my ears, but all is quiet again save for the rain's pattering. Then the knocking again—and it has a determined note in it this time. So it must be *they*! How fortunate that for the moment the gates are secured with a wooden billet! Yet, after all, *let* them come. What can it matter? It were better that the business were done with. And in any case we are ready. Yes, let them come bursting in with their obscene oaths and strike us across the face with iron bars and call for lights to be lit though neither matches nor lamp are available. . . . Not but that I recognise with a faint sense of shame that, as these men ransack our tattered clothing, our hands in our utter helplessness will be trembling, trembling a little. . . . Still the knocking goes on. Why is it that the men cannot open for themselves?

"So the end has come!" I think to myself. "At least it will all be over soon."

And though my poor old notched hatchet will be a weak defence, I grasp it—yes, and firmly at that—and issue into the corridor. And how come I suddenly to be feeling as strong and stable as a steel spring? Because now at least I know my intention. A sight of the stick always cows a cur. . . . And so I open the front door. But I behold without only darkness and hear without only the fine rain's rustling.

"Who is there?" I shout.

"Good evening, Kozai! ¹ Please open the gates."

Then it is only a Tartar!—Yet on what errand can even he have come?

"Abaidulin I am—from the house near the burial-ground—sent by my most worthy master."

¹ Malo-Russian for sir, or master of the house.

And the man names a familiar name, and clearing the gates of their wooden billet I behold before me a stout Tartar in a woolly cap.

"I am a stranger hereabouts," he goes on, "and I have been losing my way in the ravines. Eyes are no use in such darkness. But selyam alekoum!"

And he turns out to be a messenger from heaven itself, for he has brought with him a gift from my Tartar friend of the afternoon in the shape of a whole basketful of provisions—apples, dried pears, flour and a bottle of wine! Yet surely the contents have been meant to pay for the shirt? No. My friend has sent them as a gift pure and simple.

"He said to me, 'Take this basket to Gorka, but go only at night-time, and keep your eyes open or you may be killed.'" And even as the man speaks he turns his head to this side and to that. "Truly has death come to every part of this land!"

Oh, and there is some tobacco in grey paper—golden scented tobacco of Biouk-Lambatka!

Truly tobacco, flour and all are other than what they seem, for they are manna fallen upon me out of darkness. O Lord of Heaven, that Thou shouldest thus have moved the heart of that Tartar!

The messenger, a man as old as his master, seats himself before the stove. His breeches and long boots are wet and miry and steam comes from them, and his sheepskin cap is beaded over with raindrops, and his toil-worn features look grim and stern. Yet I feel that he is also very human, and grasping and pressing his wet shoulders strive to speak, but for the moment cannot. However, immediate speech is not needed. And is this Tartar, then, a barbarian"? By the great Allah, no! He is wholly a living human soul.

He rolls and lights a cigarette—then spits into the fire. And so for a while longer we sit without speaking—he upon his haunches as he feeds the stove with twigs.

"Abaidulin," I manage at last to articulate, "do you tell Gafar, do you tell old Gafar—do you say to him—do you say—just—'Allah!'"

And from the grim, bronzed features turned to the flames there comes in reply:

"You have your Allah and we ours. Yet both are one and the same."

"Abaidulin," again I say, "do you tell Gafar my old friend—do you tell him that I—that I——"

And so we go on smoking together whilst the rain patters softly upon the roof and the twigs from the Deep Ravine glow like patches of sunlight. For we two, though gazing into the flames as two separate men, are in reality one, and know ourselves to be such and know God to be standing beside us.

Then Abaidulin says:

"Time is it that I departed. Go must I whilst the night is yet black."

I accompany him to the gates and then the darkness swallows him up, and for a while I remain listening to the squelch of his departing footsteps.

Everything now has lost its terrors for me. Yes, even *they* have ceased to be actualities. This because I *know* God to have visited and watched with me this night and to have looked at me from out of that corner where lately the Tartar messenger sat—yes, He at whose bidding the rains spin their network and flames emit their glow.

"O Lord," I cry, "enter into me and all of us and abide there for ever! Yes, behold all the magnitude of our misery and lighten its burden, Thou at whose bidding the bough absorbs sunlight and communicates it to the parent tree, Thou who art omnipotent! Nor ever again leave us, O Lord! Now that this night Thou hast come to us, in that messenger, through rain and mire and darkness, leave us not, but abide with us until day shall break!" . . .

Peacefully thereafter the night pursues its course. The oaken billets burn brightly. They will do so, I know, until the morning.

THE EARTH GROANS

I CANNOT sleep. The Lord has touched my soul, and I feel these walls to be oppressive. Let me go out, then, under the heavens, even if clouds be obscuring them, and so draw nearer to Him and scent His breath in the wind and behold His light in the darkness.

The night is black, but the rain has ceased and there is a profound silence. Yet not the restful, confident stillness of a summer night; rather a silence of tenseness and expectancy, as though something out of the ordinary were about to happen. Yet *what* could happen? Then, as often happens when the wind has fallen after rain, further gusts ensue and some scattered drops besprinkle me, and the sea below sends up a sound of splashing as though it were drawing its breath heavily. Yet even so there is such a silence that the fidgeting of a dog at Verba's on the hill above me is plainly audible.

Pacing the garden softly I search the sky for stars, but they are cloud-hidden. From the earth there is issuing a moist smell as of mountain mist, and the wind is dying away again—merely a few faint but steady gusts of it keep causing the fresh boughs of the cedar-tree to besprinkle my face with droppings. But suddenly my very footsteps seem to hush themselves and all my heart thrills with horror, as once again there comes to me that long-drawn sound as of distant, agonised groanings in ravines—then a moment's hush—then once more the deep, horrible sound as of exhausted beings gasping in anguish, as of deserted creatures wailing in muffled tones.

Profoundly moving the sound is. Yet this is not the first time that I have heard it as seemingly it sent forth its stifled call from the earth's very bowels.

By this time some of the country-folk have begun to talk about it, and to say:

"You can hear it every night now, and it seems to come from the ravines nearest to the sea. First it cries 'Oo-oo-oo!' and then it sighs 'A-a-ah!' Oh, it makes one's blood run cold! Surely it is the earth groaning or else unrecovered bodies begging to be buried. And dreadful, dreadful it is!"

As I stand listening in the dead of night, once more there comes rolling up my ravine that soul-rending "Oo-oo-oo!"

It is as though the sound were searching for an outlet and, failing to find one, dragging repeated "A-a-ah's!" over the face of the land as it breathes forth its pain.

The sound catches the soul in a deadly vice of sorrow. It forces one for a moment to ask oneself whether it may not in very truth be coming from the corpses with shattered skulls and smashed-in breasts and denuded trunks which are lying cast away into the hollows the countryside over deprived of burial.

True, my intellect tells me that the sound comes from the bielukha or Black Sea seal, a species known to the fishermen as sometimes visiting these shores to breed; but also there is in me a heart—and that heart finds the cry indeed ill hearing. Nor do the fishermen themselves like either the sound or the creature, for they fear the latter and declare the fish, too, to flee as soon as, raising a rounded head above the waters and stretching its body across a rock, it sends its cry echoing through the night.

Long I listen to the sound, shrinking inwardly, for its note of torment evokes in myself a similar feeling. And as I do so the mountain aims a new blow at us, and with the rising wind I see the crests of the cypress-trees once more bending down and waving to and fro and rearing their crests against the now starlit, cloudless heavens. For twenty-four hours that wind may rage. And even twenty-four hours may not see it end—it may rage for three days. And even three days may not put a limit to it—it may continue to discharge its volleys for thrice that period. Ah, it is a wind well known to the Tartars.

A lull in the gusts lets me hear the notes of a clock striking. Then not every clock in the town is stopped? As a matter of

fact, the notes do not come from a clock at all—it is the watchman at the church beating out the hour. Unfortunately he has struck his last stroke so faintly that I am left unable to determine the time for certain. What can be the matter with him? Is the time really eleven, or did the wind carry away the sound of the last stroke of twelve?

I peer in the town's direction, but can discern there no spark or speck of light—only a great blackness. . . . Ah, but what is that glow near the sea on the town's farther side? Is it a fire? At all events a dark-red column or something of the sort is arising in the direction indicated. Oh, a fire it must be. Besides, I believe that the night's density is deceiving my eyesight, and that the dark-red column is nearer than it looks and not beside the sea at all. Possibly, then, it is rubbish burning at Odariuk's abode? Yet is it likely that a carpenter would be burning rubbish at such an hour of the night as this? From moment to moment I see the column grow broader and higher, and begin to send out more and more tongues of flame and more and more masses of black smoke.

"Fire! Fire!" With the words I see a light show in a little round attic-window at "Krasnaia Gorka," whilst criss-crossed boughs of almond-trees are coming more and more clearly into view against the conflagration's luminance, and a cypress-tree, starting from the gloom, wavers to and fro as though palpitating with life. Perhaps, then, the fire is in Odariuk's orchard? At all events his house-roof is standing silhouetted against the flames.

I make for my gates, and thence for the little plateau overgrown with bushes outside them. Arrived at that vantage-point, and standing with a black void below me, I perceive that beyond the void the nearer houses of the town, as well as the taper-like minaret of the mosque, are beginning to assume a pinkish glow, and that the sea is reflecting it, and that the wharf is emerging from the darkness, and that already the tips and the topmost branches of Odariuk's almond-trees have become as clear as in daylight, and that intermittently the wind is snuffing the column of flame, bending it seaward, and hurrying onward to riot upon the waters.

"Oh, it *is* blazing! Heavens! It must be Madame Dakhonova's villa."

The voice comes from the darkness behind me. Standing there are Yasha, wrapped in a piece of carpet, and Nurse, swathed in a ragged counterpane. She replies:

"Oh, I expect it is the sailors have fired it. Would that they would do the same to their own place! Yes, it must be Madame Dakhonova's villa."

All the glen above which I am standing is now glowing red.

"Oh," Nurse next is heard to exclaim, "but it's Michael Vasilievitch's new shed that has caught alight! Yes, it's *his* place, *his* place! I mean the little new shed which he has just knocked up for himself out of some planking. I can see it showing clearly beside his old villa. Look at it for yourself."

What? Has the old man gone and immolated himself as a sacrifice to his former abode?

Then there comes a lull as the fire dies down. It is dying down probably because the roof has fallen in, broken asunder with the shock and put the flames out. Well, a fire amongst planking does not take much starting.

"Run and find out what has happened, Yasha."

"Nurse!" the old lady's ailing voice puts in. "Where is the fire that you are speaking of?"

"In a shed near the beach. But go to sleep now. Rest under God. The fire is out."

"Very well, Nurse. But come in. We have frightened the children."

Odariuk's almond garden has ceased to be visible. All that can be seen is the afterglow. So I make to return to my verandah with a feeling upon me that something more has to be waited for. And all the time also I know what has happened, and that *I* at least need not go and make inquiries. For that it is the doctor's new dwelling that has been burnt down, I feel certain. But do I feel equally certain that *only* the——? Come! To-morrow he will have to move back into his former abode. And in any case nothing matters, all things are trifles.

The wind has now completely cleared the stars and seem-

ingly swept the Milky Way to over Kastel . . . Another hour passes, and still I seem to be waiting for something . . .

Then suddenly there come footsteps and the hard breathing of someone running!—Yasha, of course.

“Well?” we cry.

And he tells yet another tale of death. It is the doctor's place that has been burnt down. Not a soul was near it at the time, and a sailor is driving away anyone who tries to approach it, so that one cannot learn anything save that no one has seen Michael Vasilievitch since nightfall, and that the fire lasted only five minutes, and that the doctor must still be within the little building's shell, since the door still is fastened from the inside, and that the sailor is declaring the fire to have started from the inside, since he and his mates observed the fact from their look-out post, and that in any case the place was just the sort of place to catch fire, and that though one might have expected the owner of it to be one of the first to appear on the scene after the fire's starting, not a soul has yet set eyes upon him, and the question is where can he be?

“Well, bed again now for me!” Yasha winds up. Then he adds: “Just listen! There is that groaning again! This time it will be for the doctor.”

Yes, again there is resounding the groaning. Or can it be the wind amongst the empty tins? . . . Thus the doctor has perished by fire, departed in a ring of fire, committed his body to the flames. Unless an unfortunate accident was the cause of it all? Well, in either case there is nothing strange in the affair. Nothing is strange nowadays. The doctor has passed through flames to death. Another dry twig has been thrust into the stove.

THE END OF THE DOCTOR

I go to the spot with reluctance, and see before my eyes some twisted iron, a shell of cypress-wood and a few blackened boards. Yet I feel that hovering like a shelterless bird over these things here is the dead man's unquiet spirit. As for his spirit's fleshly envelope, its few remains—a skull, a fragment of shin-bone and the clasps of the bandage “specially made for me by Schwabe”—have been removed in a band-box to be exposed at the Military Office. Doubtless fat-faced clowns are already fingering the charred cranium and thrusting fingers into its eye-sockets, and exclaiming, “Look! He *was* one, to be sure!”

Yes, the doctor has gone, and in going has had a fine funeral-pyre, a pyre of his own contriving. In a veritable whirlwind of fire has his spirit ascended.

One of his colleagues has been summoned to the Military Office. He dismounts from his sleek, bell-bedecked donkey and proceeds to invert the still smouldering skull with an air as if he had thought to find an inscription inside. Then he says solemnly:

“I must endeavour to establish the deceased's identity.”

As though any day of the week a man would be found immolated on such a funeral-pyre!

And after unfastening the bandage's clasps and hooks he declaims pontifically:

“Comrade, the matter is clear. He who recently wore this article was one Doctor of Medicine Michael Vasilievitch Ignatiev. Here we have the bandage which Schwabe made for him from his own design. So pray, comrade, draw up a report to that effect.”

“Comrades,” draw up a thousand reports if you like. Fat-faced loons, go on fingering that skull and then throw it away.

It no longer has an owner. And in any case its late one left it as a special bequest to yourselves. . . .

Nurse joins me beside the shed with her usual bagful of odds and ends. And says she:

"Yes, our Michael Vasilievitch has met his death by fire. Only his skull is left, and it isn't a large one at that. Yet, look you, it had a bit of brain inside it, and some folk say that Michael had a bit of capital laid by—carried on his person by day and concealed in his place by night. And the fact that he so barred and bolted up his place looks as though he was afraid of something. And indeed there are those who are saying that *they* came during the storm last night and strangled him, and then set fire to it all to cover things up. Oh, we don't talk about these things, but we know them, all the same. Well, he's gone, and our turn 'll come next. . . . By the way, there's one of your pullets that I haven't seen lately. I suppose it is the one which a hawk seized upon the ridge the other day. Ah! I thought so. At the time I was on my way to the town, and I screamed at the bird, 'Let go of it, you villain!' but it didn't care a bit—it and its accursed mates have grown too bold to care. We ourselves 'll soon have the same thing happening to us." . . .

The morning is hard and clear after a frost at least sufficient to form ice on the pools. Upon both Babugan and Kush-Kai snow has fallen. The glitter of it hurts the eyes. It is as though winter were hanging out its linen. Only in these lower parts, under the mountains' shelter, is there sunshine still playing upon leaf-stripped garden and empty vineyard and greenish-brown foothill, whilst blue tits, those mournful minstrels of the autumnal season, are making the chill desolation resonant with their song, and every voice and sound is carrying farther in the robust, rarefied, rime-laden air.

But what is the meaning of that strenuous labour over there? For I see men plying axes with zealous vigour on the site of the late doctor's almond orchard. From the way that they are shaping beams and wielding roofing tools they would seem to be professional carpenters. Then for whom is the villa being thus repaired? Not for long past has there been seen such a burst of industry.

Nurse, with a piece of boarding trailing behind her, meets me as she returns from the hill foot, and I inquire of her:

"Who can those carpenters be, and for whom are they doing that building work?"

"Doing that building work! Why, all that they are doing is to celebrate a mass for Michael Vasilievitch. To-morrow will see the last of his old house pulled to pieces. Anyone who wants anything that the place can provide can just go and take it. O Lord, may Thy will be done! And they've stripped off all the iron, and now they're also making away with the woodwork. You see, the woodwork will make good fuel, and the iron is sound—good, stout, twelve-pounds-to-the-arshin stuff it is."

"Well, the work seems to be progressing briskly," I remark; after which Nurse continues:

"Yes, Michael Vasilievitch was a builder indeed! What he built he meant to last for ever. And now in a single day it is being destroyed! How come our folk to be guilty of such wickedness? For it *is* the people, you know—fishermen and anyone else who cares to take a hand. And they tear out things right and left. Aye, and there are some of the new militia and a commissar's assistant doing the same as the rest! This morning, too, I saw a chit of a lad go running to the place. And when I shouted to him, 'How comes a wicked young rascal like *you* to be making off with other people's property?' he answered me back with, 'Anyone can do that now, for everything belongs to the people. I've got my father working here, and I'm taking the stuff home for him.' There, now! Yes, and the young wretch went on, 'Just you take some of the stuff yourself—as much of it as you can manage. That is the rule for everyone.' And to think that whilst folk everywhere are dying of hunger, *they*, those villains have for them only 'Take them away and drown them!' Why, I myself am just starving. Yet here I am collecting firewood!"

Then those men are not carpenters at all, but merely men "celebrating a mass for Michael Vasilievitch"! . . . Thence I turn my eyes to the doctor's other dwelling, to his last little corner of refuge, to the last thing which his dying vision must

have caressed, to the place where of old the sun must often have thrust its beams through the windows and played upon eyes as bright as itself. Even as I gaze I see those beams flickering upon, striping and patching the spot which once knew panelled walls, and flooring worn to a hollow with frequent paces, and a little white ink-smudged, inkstained table, and a diminutive verandah, and clusters of the glycerine plants which, before they shed their leaves on the approach of winter, are a delight to the eye with their loveliness of blue, and window-panes dim for want of washing. . . .

Well, let us go hence. By to-morrow those window-panes will have been forced out, those walls pulled down, that roof ripped off, everything rolled or dragged away by purloiners who chuckle like complacent ghouls. And that done, the last of the cedar-, cypress- and almond-trees will be cut down and the resultant rubbish left for the rain to remove with its muddy rivulets.

The little dwelling returns my gaze and seems to be saying, "Are you going to leave me?" Then again it looks at me with its desolate eyes and repeats sadly, "Are you *really* going to leave me?" . . .

I glance about for something to lean against for a moment. . . . Then how if I too were to set my teeth and make Death my humble submission? Other human beings are dying without a murmur, and what other road remains for myself, in what other direction can I turn?

Yes, rude clowns will hold up that charred skull and poke their fingers into its eyeholes and say with a chuckle, "What a curiosity, to be sure!" . . .

On the Pass there is snow. On the sea all routes are closed. On the mountains' farther side there are none but lonely paths, and beyond, again—well beyond again, there is nought but snow, snow, snow. So whither can I make my way, in what direction can I turn?

THE END OF TAMARKA

WIND and flood have come. In the mountains winter thunderstorms are booming. In the ravines great torrents are roaring and bubbling over the stony watercourses. In the gardens the blasts of gales are levelling withy fences and tossing aloft the bushy branches of cypresses. On the sea a tempest is lashing the waves to frenzy.

By night my study walls rock to and fro with the wind, and the roof never ceases to re-echo with a dull clattering as of iron-shod boots or heavy fists, and the half-choked stove nearly stifles us with smoke from contents too damp to do anything but smoulder, too dull to evoke the visions which may be born of flame.

And meanwhile, in the adjoining shed, we hear our gentle poultry stirring uneasily on their perch, and know that if any one of them through weakness slips from its position, it long stands trembling in the darkness before it can regain a place for itself, there to squat or cling in a desperate effort to absorb a little warmth before once more day shall dawn. By this time three pullets alone are left. And even they will be gone soon, and with them our last-surviving link with the past. They walk afieid no longer. They merely stand gazing into our eyes.

Nights of watchfulness breed mournful days. But did I say days. Why, days no longer exist. True, the sun is still in its place and day seemingly succeeds to day: yet always now, when the sun rises out of the sea, it rises mist-covered, and then proceeds to peer at the light-streaked waters but with a cold, metallic-looking gleam. The fishermen, too, look apprehensively at the waters, for those toilers' resources are constantly dwindling, and at any moment a storm may drive away the last pilchard and the last tunnyfish—if indeed any such fish are still remaining. Certainly the dolphins no

longer revolve on the surface like great black cog-wheels: and though it might be possible to secure an occasional specimen with a rifle-shot, whence could one procure such a weapon? Only the sailors have rifles, and *they* need no dolphin-meat, for there is good mutton always at their disposal.

So the fishermen's eyes are downcast and their faces as darkling as the soil.

Recently some members of their artel raised a clamour at the doors of the town hall and shouted to the "comrade" of their "jurisdiction" that he must give them and their children food.

And the "comrade," a revolver bulging from a breeches-pocket, shouted back (he did so less in "comrade" fashion than as one having authority):

"Good fishermen, I beg of you not to create a panic."

And he was answered with a roar of:

"Then give us bread in exchange for our fish."

As it happened, however, the "comrade" also knew how to roar, and retorted:

"All in good time. All in good time. So far, my fine fellows, you have set the Proletariat a good example as regards discipline. Well, continue to show that example now. To-night we are going to hold a meeting for the purpose of discussing the urgent problem of how best we can assist our heroes in the Don Basin."

Which met with clamorous cries of:

"By letting *them* have your beaver hat and ourselves what is due to us for our fish." . . .

Yes, shout away, you commissars, and force our young men to frequent the human slaughter-houses within the town, so that fat-jowled, cut-throat sailors may rid them of their "greenness," and make them drunk on blood—even incite them to pour blood into a tankard, and quaff it to the dregs! . . .

The morning is grey with a fine, weeping rain. Suddenly I hear my entrance-gates creak. Then there comes a knocking at them. Surely it is not the wind?

Again the knocking. Who can it be, and on what errand?

"What is it?" is my call, and a nervous childish voice replies:

"Is our Tamarka here, if you please? We have been looking for her all night. She must have been stolen."

Oh, to think that that lovely white and brown-spotted creature should have been roasted and eaten!

With a sob Verba's little one goes on:

"She was brought up by our Mammy, you know, and used to give us a bottleful of milk every day."

To think of Tamarka's poor dried-up teats having ever produced milk! Assuredly she can only have secreted it by licking stones!

And the family has been searching for her all night through ravine and thicket!

"Yes, and that is how Lizabeta lost *her* cow last night," continues the child. "But we shall know soon who took *hers*, for one of the sailors is seeing about it."

"And the sailors themselves have lost a cow," a voice shouts to us from high up the knoll.

The next event is the appearance of a breathless, dishevelled, dark-featured Lizabeta in person. She exclaims:

"Oh, do you know, my cow has been stolen during the night! And lately she had been giving us ten cupfuls of milk a day and feeding us well!"

"Then you had been feeding well on stolen stuff," Koriak, also just arrived, puts in. "Remember that the sailors are none too well off and wanted something as a sauce for their borsh."

"But I tell you that they themselves have had a cow stolen—and right from under a sentry's nose."

So at Gorka a crowd collects, with amongst it the school-mistress, hugging herself against the cold, Nurse of the tremulous head, her old mistress with shoulders wrapped in a piece of carpet, Koriak attracted by the stir, Nurse's elder son fresh from another wine-smuggling expedition, and the tall, thin, bewhiskered Verba, maker of wine. And each of them has the face of a walking corpse.

Cries Lizabeta suddenly:

"Why, *I* know who has gone and done it! That rascally

Uncle Andrei, of course. Let's go and inform against him. He's the man, he's the man."

"Yes, and we haven't set eyes upon him these three days past," comments the schoolmistress. "He has been gone upon another of his 'journeys to the steppes.'"

"A regular murderer that man is," Verba remarks. "Such curs as that ought to be killed. He goes and steals your goat, eats my geese, makes a meal of your two drakes and guzzles down my Tamarka. Damn him, he ought to be put an end to."

"Aye, it's the only thing to be done with him. See here, neighbour. You've been keeping cows these thirty years, haven't you, without ever losing a single one. Well, why should one disappear *now*? Oh, that fellow ought to be killed. People needn't boggle over a killing nowadays."

"Not so loudly, not so loudly!"

"The fellow's a regular villain. And he has others with him. But let that Sania see to the business. He's arrested Lame Andrei of the lower vineyard already, as he and Odariuk had been seen lurking about the place."

"Then the gang had better be put to death all together."

"Hush! There is Sania coming along at this moment."

And sure enough we see approaching us the great flat-faced, lusty sailor whose name is Sania, with rifle on shoulder, revolver in hand and wench—to wit Gashka—behind. The wench in question is wearing a pair of exceedingly dirty white shoes, a skirt of green silk and a jacket of blue plush, and Nurse knows that jacket, for it used to belong to Madame Dakhonova, and as "redundant property" left behind by Madame when she escaped overseas to Constantinople, was annexed by the sailor and presented by him to the flaunting Gashka.

"Already I've caught two of the rascals," he bawls before reaching us as he flourishes his revolver. "I'm the one to ferret out a man! I can find him to his last guts. Yes, and I'll find your cow in the same way, mamasha. As for my own, they took it from under my very nose!"

The fellow, as bulking as a sack of oats, has, in spite of the cold, a red neck laid bare to the shoulders and as sinewy as a

bullock's. And all his features are shining with heat and his grey eyes glittering.

"I mean to give the thief a tap or two on the head," he goes on. "Oh, he shall use his tongue right enough. Now, mamasha! Don't keep wriggling about and screeching like that. You're going to have your cow back again. I'm going to see that you do. Now, which of you knows anything, and where does that man live?"

"No!" puts in Gashka. "Why not take all these people before the Field Court-Martial, for all of them are bourgeois-corrupted and ought to be exterminated without mercy?"

"No. The Court-Martial has given me my written instructions to carry out, and they are that I shall arrest certain suspected persons and get 'the bathroom' ready for them. How could any real proletarian want to steal another man's cow? And may any proletarian keep a cow unless it's been earned by his own labour? Now, bring me anyone who knows anything about this business."

Gashka seizes his arm, and cries:

"Sanok, do first telegraph or telephone to Mishka to send us a motor-car. Then we can ride whilst searching for the cow."

"No," replies the sailor. "Before we do any more joy-riding I must become officially acquainted with the business."

So everyone proceeds to "Tikhaia Pristan." And there the locked door of the wing is broken in and a discovery made of some goose-feathers and a grey-tufted shin-bone!

"Bubik!" is Marina's triumphant exclamation. "Yes, that is Bubik! Oh, from the very first I knew it!"

And all Gorka is in a ferment and so remains for the next three days. And for the next three days two alleged slayers of kine lie huddled in a cellar. Those two alleged slayers are Lame Andrei and Odariuk—the latter now absolutely doubled up with hunger. Next it becomes rumoured that they have each of them been given a dose of "the bathroom," but will not confess. Then it goes abroad that ramrods have been laid about them and their rations altogether cut off—with no better result as regards confession.

Still more excited does Gorka become when, on a search

being made under Odariuk's flooring, there come to light some cowheel and some beef fat. And the next thing that we hear is that someone has purloined those commodities. And the next thing again that a boy has died in agony from a surfeit of beef fat. And the next thing again and the last that, digging in the ground, the sailor has come upon a cowhide, and that that cowhide has been identified by Verba as having lately belonged to his property Tamarka.

BREAD BAKED WITH BLOOD

FASTER, ever faster life here is unwinding its skein. Daily the texture of the skein is becoming increasingly shot with black. Surely the skein's end has nearly been reached? Yet no apparent restlessness, apparent expectancy is visible, but only a stony contemplation. Hearts are worn out now. All poignant anguish has drained away in tears. Hope finally lies dead.

Still, though, the blood can run cold at times. . . .

Amid rain and wind I seek to benumb my thoughts by pacing the garden. And as I am methodical of nature, I keep clearing stones from the little paths as I go and collecting them tidily into heaps. It is a habit of mine, even as is that of nightly securing the gates with a wooden billet.

Then someone fumbles at the gates with a sound as of a mouse scratching.

"Who is it?" I call, and a very young voice replies nervously:

"It is Anuta, Mamma's little girl."

So again it is our tiny food forager! And indeed for long past Anuta has known no other road than the one leading to my dwelling.

"Come in," I say—though already I know what has happened.

She enters without a sound, enters like a shadow—halts there in the garden and buries her face in her little hands, in the attitude which grief has taught all too soon.

"They—they have just taken away Papa," she gasps. "And our little Grishuna died to-day. And men have seized all the fat and tripe that we had got stored against the winter!"

And that mite of a creature stands shaking from head to foot, weeping into her clenched hands—that little mite of a thing!—And what can I do? I can but stand clenching my

fists, crushing down the heart that longs to shout aloud all that is in it. . . .

You smackers of lips over "the achievements of humanity," you solemn advocates of "progress," never have *you* looked upon such things. To you they are but the oiling of the wondrous machine known to you as "The Future," the dross and waste of moulding that "Future" in a mighty smelter the resultant contents of which can be seen already. . . .

But ah, that barefooted child in that garden there! A crescent moon emerges from behind a cloud, wraps her in its light and shows her to be clad only in one of her mother's ragged skirts and a buttonless pink jacket, and to be trembling from head to foot as dimly she divines the further horrors awaiting her. For that same diminutive creature has learnt already things which past generations, with their myriad souls, never had to envisage. This little town of ours beside the sea is, compared with Russia's territories, but a speck, but a grain of poppy-seed, but a particle of sand. Yet also it is a microcosm to itself. . . .

So what can I do for her? No word have I to say. No. . . . But I can lay my hand upon her shoulder. . . .

She departs bearing with her a dried scone, a handful of almonds and pears and some withered grape-skins in a handkerchief.

Thus some of us here can still feel horror—our hearts have not yet become so atrophied as not to be able to contract with pity for the wailings which every fold of the countryside keeps sending forth. And those wailings are not the cryings of the Black Sea seal. They are the wailings of humanity itself, as though the very earth were in torment. Even now is the moonlight showing me the black gables and tomblike roof of Odariuk's dwelling. And to think of that lad who, near there, the other day—! Yes, Death is waiting at every door here, like a pale shadow—waiting, waiting to bear his victims hence.

Suddenly a shudder passes over me. Surely that pale shadow is even now before my eyes—gliding along in the moonlight behind that fence and those cypress-trees?—Then,

just as I am about to shout to the shadow, "Halt! Who are you?" I perceive that same shadow to be only Uncle Andrei in his canvas suit. So he must be making for his lair at "Tik-haia Pristan"? At all events he has the inevitable bundle on his back and seems once more to have just returned from the steppes. Then does he think to win home unobserved? The fool had better have remained on the steppes and died there!

Next morning Gorka is in an uproar again. Uncle Andrei has been arrested! The sailor and a militiaman did the arresting! Yes, and now he has been taken away to "the bath"!

And that term "the bath"?

"The bath's" organisers at least know the term's meaning. Later a militiaman explains it to some of us. Says he:

"What a pretty fancy in that sort of thing our fellows at the look-out station have! No mark whatsoever left—and of course that means a sand-filled bag. My word, it makes folk gasp a bit as it comes down upon them! Shock, you see. Yet never a mark remaining! And for bringing them back to consciousness? Oh, just a bit of an internal gingering. Where they hit them is mostly under the heart. What? Do you ask whether we ever did such things before? Well, before there never used to be such serious cases. Here have these fellows cut up *seventeen* cows—and all of them belonging to workers! So don't you think that the Proletariat ought to defend itself? What would become of us all if it didn't? 'I,' one of these prisoners said, 'have been travelling on the steppes'—R-r-raz-z-z! 'You have been travelling on the steppes, you say?' 'Ye-es'—but not quite in the same tone as before—Two-a!—under the heart this time. 'You *still* say that you have been travelling on the steppes?' 'Ye-e-es'—and again the voice is changed (oh, I tell you it was fun!). And then one over the head—here, just above the nape. And that left him unconscious, or 'shocked.' So that is where 'the bath' comes in, do you understand? The prisoner had to have water poured over him. And then he softened. 'You—you still say, do you, that you have been travelling on the steppes?' But no reply at all this time. Yet none of the three will confess outright. Perhaps

hunger helps them to hold out like that, but anyway they won't give in; they just set their teeth over it. Aye, and they've given Lame Andrei a dose of the ramrod as well. And though he's elderly, he stood it—just gasped, and still wouldn't give way. So he and Odariuk have had to be let out on bail until the court sits again—and in any case they can't run away. The other of the two Andreis will have to be let out, too, for we've no rations for such folk. So you see what can come of hunger."

Yes, how could those men "run away" with snow in the Pass?—Yet there at this moment the barefooted Tania is tramping along with her keg splashing the wine about on her back! Nor to tell the truth could she well do otherwise, for remember that there are the children and that she has only her body and her blood to feed them with.

The confinement of my garden fence is no longer to be borne, and donning my broken old boots I set forth for a tramp along the miry highway and over the sodden foothills. Yet what have I come out to see? What can I hope to see? Never do the distances show me anything, nor for that matter are there any distances visible to-day, but merely heavy mists creeping downward from Babugan. Chatyr Dagh, too, is covered over and may be going to "breathe" again—this time with a breath of snow. And when I glance seaward I see the waters to be all leaden of hue under the sinuous files of cormorants which are tacking about the turbid surface and skirting the glimmering shingle ridges. Only at rare intervals does the sun peep forth with a pale, metallic gleam—shoot a solitary band of light across the waters—shoot another one—again withdraw. So that veritably it might be the Sun of the Dead again. And the horizon, too, seems to be weeping. . . .

Gorka has now quietened down. The only sound there is the sore weeping of my old neighbour Nurse. A week ago I noticed that she had begun to look sad and anxious as she walked about, and somehow to seem apprehensive. And now she is wholly lost in tears, and the notes of her thin wailing, a sound sometimes seeming to come from beneath rather

than above me, keep floating across my garden fence. And why is she sorrowing? Because in the far-off steppe country beyond the Pass her son Alexis has just met his death.

It was Koriak that first brought us the news, for the same Koriak, the ex-coachman that recently dealt out justice to old Glazkov, has just had justice dealt out to himself through the fact that side by side with Nurse's young Alexis there has been slain that Koriak's young son-in-law. And to think that only a short while ago Nurse paused beside my fence and said cheerfully:

"I am expecting soon to be able to breath freely again, for my Alexis and Koriak's son-in-law are returning home after taking some more wine to the steppes, and bringing with them wheat and fat for ourselves and something with which to pay the Tartars for the wine-cask. So what a Christmas it will be!"

When Koriak brought the news he did so by night and said:

"There have come to me tidings of misfortune. Those tidings are that the other day, out on the steppes there, a hundred versts from here, some people found my son-in-law's horse grazing by the wayside, and lying near it—those two, your lad and mine. And having been killed, the two lads were lying together when dead even as they had lived together as friends whilst they were still alive. Unfortunately the people who found them could do nothing with the horse (a good horse, a fine horse it is, too), for it refused to leave its master, and the same with the stuff—they were disturbed, and obliged to run away, whilst they were still struggling with the horse, though since then of course they may have returned to the spot. Each of the bodies showed a bullet-hole behind the ear, and persons who were not far off at the time say that the men who did it were armed with rifles, and that when they had done it they threw the bodies into the ditch. Evidently someone had kept a watch upon our lads—they had been betrayed. And the most likely one to have betrayed them is young Kolka, Glazkov's son, the son who ran away to join the Greens, for he once threatened to kill me when I gave his father that beating. So now our two lads have

come by their fate, and if we should recover those bagfuls of wheat and barley there will probably be blood in the flour when baked, for it was upon them that the dying bodies fell. However, everything gatherable in these days must be gathered."

So at dawn the next day the three of them set out for the Pass and its snowdrifts—Nurse's younger son Yasha, Koriak's widowed daughter and Koriak himself. And they took nothing with them, save that force of old habit led Koriak the ex-coachman to snatch up his whip as he came away. The goal of the party was the provisions, the bodies and the horse.

And so for two days past old Nurse has been mourning, with the old lady nearly worn out with insomnia and anxiety sitting beside her; and glowing in front of them a little stove filled with sodden, hissing fuel.

Yet even under such circumstances one may have beguiling dreams, and Nurse has just had one such—a dream of opulence and satiety. Later she told it me as follows:

"In my sleep I seemed to be walking in a field, but a field without real soil to it—its clods were all of lard and fat. And in that field my Alexis was standing dressed in a long white shirt that reached to his feet, and had wings to his shoulders, and was turning over the clods as though he had been strewing manure. And as soon as he saw me he cried out, 'Oh, mamasha, do see what lard and fat we've got now!' but when I took up one of the clods and tried to eat it, it would not go down my throat for the best of trying, and at last turned me sick with its richness."

And from that vision of sickness Nurse awoke to vomit in reality. But though she related the dream to everyone, and tramped the knoll over to do so, none could give her a word of comfort, and for a week she was in a state bordering upon distraction. Then one day Marina Semenovna said—said to the world at large, but not to Nurse herself:

"Behold, Nurse is about to have a sign befall her because of her Alexis. And a sign indeed it will be!"

And sure enough "a sign" befell Nurse because of her Alexis, for in due time there came into her hands some wheat

stained with his blood. But in these days wheat of every kind has perforce to be eaten, and even as I write she and hers are washing, rewashing the blood-stained grain vouchsafed her. . . .

Yes, but never, for all time, will the stain be effaced from that grain.

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO

Snow is falling and melting and growing thicker and thicker, whilst the wind rages and shrieks. On the nearer mountains the ground is piebald with snow patches, and so are the cypresses and the vineyards and the garden fences. And ever, as the snow piles itself up and collects into drifts and spreads a general whiteness, the storm howls and plies broom and whip-lash. For winter has fairly seized us in its grip, and fresh from Babugan and Chatyr Dagh and every other quarter of the mountains, is twirling a night-long, day-long mop. Even Kastel has ceased to wear its sable cap and become a giant of sugar-candy crowned with a napkin or a tablecloth, whilst its fellows are grown so grey and misty as scarcely to be distinguishable against the pale background of the heavens—the only objects standing out are the endlessly circling eagles.

Also the storm is driving the birds of the woodlands to shelter and forcing yellow-beaked, fluttering blackbirds to forage hut-enclosures and empty gardens for food, and Tartar herdsmen to fold the remnants of their sheep-flocks within hurdles rather than let them run into danger by roaming the countryside. And the herdsmen watch the falling snow none the less despondently because artificial fodder has become unprocurable and their charges are failing. But the eagles still circle over the mountains, for snow means to them not terror, but booty.

Trudging through the tempest comes a little Tartar in a sheepskin coat, with the snow melting on the steed which he is leading behind him. And he shouts to Gorka and all the white wilderness:

"Hi-i-i! Who will buy this horse of mine? Who will buy him? Hi-i-i!"

Until, with the animal stumbling over the snow-hidden bushes, he halts at my gates and gives a knock, and once more shouts:

"Kozai-i-i! Pray take this horse of mine, will you? I want something to get food with, and he is just the horse for your use. Hi-i-i! Pray take him off me."

As I contemplate him from my threshold I can see him beating his breast behind the fence, kicking his heels to and fro and jerking his body about. He is a little fellow with wild eyes and a black moustache, and, on my going out to him, seizes me by the sleeve, and once more says:

"*Please* take my horse! Do!"

As the words issue they have a guttural ring, whilst his face and eyes look almost agonised in their supplication, and from his nose there is hanging either a tear or a great drop of sweat. A choumovoi¹ Tartar he is, and as he shouts at me he keeps shivering and shaking, twisting his lips about, convulsing his swarthy features and letting his hands wander about over his horse's neck. The animal, though, has nothing but a skeleton under its hide, and its nostrils are drawn in, and it keeps plucking hungrily with outstretched teeth at the bare hedge. The Tartar has been riding it to the point of steaming, and he is almost steaming himself.

"Hi-i-i!" he ejaculates with a look of anguish and gripping my arm. "Here is the very horse for you. *Please* take him! I am in need of food—I have not a morsel by me, and the winter's snows have come."

The sight of his desperate eyes fills me with a sort of vague, uneasy pain, for they are the eyes of a man trying to escape some horror which is in front of him.

"My friend," I say, "I too have not a morsel."

But he will not accept this—he repeats:

"Pray take my horse Arabouk. This is only his seventh winter, and he is a splendid horse, a horse of gold. So take him and keep him, for I have no food for him left, and the snow and the terrible weather of winter are here. So take him, I beg of you."

¹ That is to say a Tartar of the nomad or tent-living type.

As he speaks he indicates the town with his hand, and involuntarily I do the same. Then hopelessly, despairingly we exchange a glance. Then—and then a perfect torrent of words bursts from him—bursts from his black eyes as much as from the mouth which an agony of foreboding and a tremulous apprehension of failure are twisting into convulsions.

"From Biouk-Lambat I am," he cries. "And do you know, my wife Aliushta has run away from me—last night I awoke to find her gone, and I am simply perishing."

His cry might almost be the cry of a wild beast! . . .

Then he turns sharply, gives a jerk and a tug at the horse's reins and moves away. But the animal is reluctant to follow him, for, like its master's, its heart is full of fear.

His closing appeal is still ringing in my ears as he and his steed disappear amid the snow of the ravine. And the appeal keeps recurring to me afterwards.

Then I wade through the snowdrifts to a little plateau where the same porous universal mantle has heaped itself upon the oaken scrub. And thence looking downward I can see Tartar and horse picked out in silhouette and their stumblings throwing up behind them a cloud of snow-dust. Evidently, then, the Tartar is for the town.

He hails, he says, from Biouk-Lambat, which I know to be the home of wondrous golden tobacco. Yet where exactly does Biouk-Lambat stand? Oh, not far away, twelve versts or so from here. And was not someone speaking of it recently? Yes—the talk was of someone who has just died there. Who was that person? Oh, the widow of a great Russian artist who fled for refuge to a Tartar establishment and expired there of starvation. Well, her husband's pictures must long ago have gone across the mountains.

And that snow, that snow! No wonder that even a choumovoï Tartar feared it! For long enough now will it lie spread over the dead herbage.

Darkness comes drawing in. Whither can that Tartar be trudging away amid this blind obscurity? He is one of the nomad Tartars, though, and on finding the booths closed in the bazaar will doubtless make shift with a café.

T

Ever the darkness grows thicker, Kastel more opaque. As I peer at the desolate void of snowy waste, of oncoming night, I can discern of its details only an inky-black sea against a lighter-coloured beach. But the note of the water's sougning somehow sounds deeper than usual. Oh, that will be because of its huge gulplings of snow. So by land and by sea there is only chaos, with the sable waters and the pale coastline confronting one another.

Nevertheless, even as things here are now, so they were many thousands of years ago. Then as now there were here emptiness, night, the hollow-sougning sea and wilderness-surrounded human beings. And *those* human beings had not so much as learnt the use of fire, but strangled wild beasts with their bare hands or brought them down with stones or stunned them with clubs from the concealment of the caves around Chatyr Dagh and Kastel. Yet surely those human beings have come to life again and are being looked upon by the very same primordial face of Kush-Kai that looked upon them long ago and sheltered them then? Yes, of a surety that is the case, and as the unseen hand records fresh entries upon that primordial face I read the entries and maybe understand something of them. And just as at the present time there are around me only blue-gleaming snowdrifts and black distances and not a visible spark of light, so in those distant days there was never a spark to be seen, but only the same void as now, the void come back from the ages to proclaim, "I am Chaos returned!"

Yes, I *know* that it has returned, for once more men are living with stone for their weapon. Only yesterday I heard said of the Sudak district that:

"On the mountain roads there men are hiding behind the rocks and waylaying children and—well, with a stone, you know, and dragging them off."

Indeed, everywhere stone is now in the ascendant—in once splendid Bakhtchi-Sarai and in Starii Krim, and everywhere else. Then by what magic power have the centuries thus been rolled back? How comes mankind's once stately starward progress to have undergone deflection? What has

happened to the great ascent and the proud declaration, "We will be even as gods"?

Behold then that vast rock face of stone projecting from the mantle of snow! What a force indeed it represents! Verily, if anything has returned to us from the ages, it is *that*. Listen. "I am come into my own again." And come into its own again it has.

Farther and farther, aimlessly, I thread the snow-covered ravines. For I too am returned from the ages; I too am a barbarian of the caves. Unfortunately, though, I lack a shaggy hide for my covering. To cover me I have only a tattered suit and boots with toe-caps worn away until the rag-wrapt feet project. Nor have I at my disposal the cave-man's strength. And yet how intelligible and how familiar that life of my far-off ancestors seems to my instincts! And to think that though they had snow and darkness as have I, they lacked even fire to combat them with, and could not, as soon I shall be doing, light a stove on their return indoors! Yet for all that they survived.

O Lord my God, by what forces, then, was that marvel wrought? It was wrought, O Lord, by Thine own forces, in that Thou, the Only God, didst at length vouchsafe them fire from heaven and enable them through its means to overcome. I believe that and I *know* that. And now men are engaged in stamping out that fire again. That I know as well. And it follows that if stone is thus vanquishing fire, that which is being stamped out is really the fruit of millions of years, a myriad acts of human achievement—thrown to waste in a single day! And by what forces is *this* marvel being wrought? By the forces of stone and by the forces of darkness. I perceive that and I know it. . . .

Kastel by now has passed from blueness to non-existence, and left remaining only darkness and loneliness.

Then suddenly I hear something snort in the void of the ravine behind me, something which sounds like the heavy breathing of a tired horse. And next I see a dark mass staggering upward with a cleaving of the snow before it, and perceive it once more to be the Tartar and his steed—both

panting with distress. Gladly I would return to my entrance-gates, but the Tartar overtakes me before I can do so.

"Do buy my horse!" is his renewed plea. "There is no one else to do so, and night has fallen. Pray take him. I implore it of you by Allah."

This time I cannot see his face, but only the horse, which keeps tossing its head as though to rid itself of the reins, and fidgeting about, and kicking its heels into a snowdrift, whilst a light steam-cloud rises from and floats above it. The pair look like a couple of phantoms, but as soon as I seek to wave them from me and to undo the gates and enter, the Tartar catches at me with an imploring hand and reiterates his entreaties. And still he is in the midst of them when something suddenly causes him to break off and bend forward to peer at some, to myself invisible, object in the ravine. Then he gives a tug at the reins, slaps the now seemingly slumbering horse upon the neck, and with jerks and more tugs at the animal starts to pursue someone whom he appears to have discerned in the darkness.

"Hi-i-i!" I hear him shout. "Sir! Master! Will *you* take my horse? Hi-i-i, Kozai!"

I strain my eyes in the direction of the shouts, but still can see no one. Then to whom can the Tartar be appealing? Has he really found someone prepared to relieve him of his growing burden of terror? Certainly no such deliverer is visible to my sight, but still the Tartar keeps running and calling out.

Then I step to the gates, open them, shut them again, shoot home the catch, and make all secure with the wooden billet.

And sure enough next morning I learn that the Tartar has actually secured a customer for his animal, and as a result returned to Biouk-Lambat the richer by six pounds of grain. Perhaps the horse may live to see better days, and perhaps it may not, but in any case how will the Tartar get on without it?

Later the Father-deacon remarked to a townsman:

"What a fool that Tartar was! Why, a spent horse is meant to be eaten, and this particular horse might have fed the man

and his family for a month if he had pickled its flesh and eaten the carcass gradually."

"But, Father, there is no salt to be got?"

"Then he could have smoke-dried it."

"But maybe he was fond of his horse?"

"Fond of it! Why, in that case, how came he to let it go for six pounds of grain? You simpleton, you! *Fond* of it! Why, what had happened was that he had lost his head through panic."

And I for my part *know* that the Tartar had lost his head through panic.

THREE PASSINGS

For three days now the snowdrifts have been melting, and as they dissolve into rivulets, coating my ravine with mud and once more allowing my rows of sodden vine-stems and vine-tendrils to become visible. And as the snow which so unnerved the Tartar runs away the earth re-erects its flattened herbage and the sun gives out a morsel of warmth.

But in the meanwhile Lame Andrei of the lower vineyard has gone hence. For a week after his "bath" he walked about without saying a word, but constantly making a hacking noise in his throat. And then he lay down, said painfully once or twice, "those men have broken something in my inside," and expired.

Odariuk also has gone hence. For two weeks after *his* "bath" he could not rest anywhere, but kept walking about, sitting about, and lying about, and was always ailing, always complaining that "when those men beat me they drove some coins into my middle," and had caused something to press upon his heart. And during those two weeks his face became the face of a withered-up little old man. Besides, he could keep nothing down his throat. He would ask for a little water, drink a mouthful, and be unable to retain it. Just when death came he gave a single convulsive cry of "My inside is all on fire!" threw a last glance at his children with two great tears running from his eyes, and departed.

Uncle Andrei, too, was let out after his "bath" and a complete confession, and returned to "Tikhaia Pristan." But this time he had upon him the stillness of a man exhausted with a great effort—it remained upon him even as in his now much-frayed and blackened canvas suit he once more roamed Gorka in search of food. Once, for example, he heard that Antonina Vasilievna of the wheat cove had had

her cow slaughtered rather than run the risk of having it stolen: wherefore, setting forth one evening at dusk, he posted himself on her threshold and stood there like a ghost. For a while Antonina Vasilievna did not see him—she was too busily engaged in chopping beef suet into a bowl, and meanwhile Uncle Andrei was enabled to perceive that there was something sparkling in a pot on the hearth-stone, and that a white pinewood table had on it a piece of cow's liver and some cow's brain, and that a rough dish-clout contained a pickled cow's rib.

But at last she did turn round, and being afraid of ghosts and startled, cried out:

"What? Is that really you, Uncle Andrei—is it your actual, real self? Well, what have you come for?"

"For—for, if you please, a morsel of tripe. Just a morsel, give me, for the love of Heaven!"

So she gave him a full handful of "chop meat," cut off a slice of liver of the size of her palm, and rounded off the lot with a small sidebone. Uncle Andrei looked at her with tears in his eyes, gulped and said:

"Nevertheless, everything seems to have gone wrong in me. It is as though all my bowels had got into a twisted knot. What is the best remedy for it? I can see you standing before me, but you look bigger and spread out. Maybe I am going to faint."

So he was given some peppercorn brandy.

After that Uncle Andrei toured the villas for a meat chopper, but could obtain one nowhere. "What," said folk, "can a starving man be wanting with a meat chopper?"

"It is," he explained, "because I cannot chew anything. I have lost all my teeth." And he dropped his dental consonants as he spoke.

"But how came you to lose them all at once?"

"Against—against a stone."

Then he walked about for another week in the same way, but with a stoop that kept constantly increasing. And when he heard that both Lame Andrei and Odariuk had taken their leave of this world he went and presented

himself before Marina Semenovna as she was sitting on her verandah at the hour of eventide.

And she said grimly:

"Have you forgotten everything?"

And pitifully, like a trapped wolf, he replied:

"No—I have forgotten nothing."

When later Marina related to me the interview she did so as one at once sorry and not sorry for the man.

"At the time," she said, "there was that wind blowing from Chatyr Dagh, a wind to make one hug oneself from the cold. And Andrei was shaking all over as he stood there. 'Why stand?' said I to him. 'Why not seat yourself upon that stool?' And he seated himself—upon the extreme edge, and looked round the place and took in everything. Then he says, 'You have some nice curtains there—splendid ones; but take care that they're not found and made off with.' Well, this set me on to ask him, 'What have *you* got in that bag of yours, and where are you bound for?' and he said that he was bound for Grigori Odariuk's, where he hoped to bid the corpse farewell (and, by the way, it had been lying for four days unburied), and then to receive permission to spend the night, since, as he no longer had the strength to chop firewood, his own place was so cold as to force him to spend the nights shivering. 'And in the morning,' he went on, 'I shall go to the hospital, I think, for I feel as though I had got flames burning in my inside, and I believe it to be ruptured. With me, the same as with those other two, the men must have broken something and caused internal paralysis. Oh, it is for all the world as though a rat were wriggling in and gnawing at my bowels.' 'Ah, but,' said I—for I fairly let myself go then, and didn't care what came out of my mouth,—'don't you think that it may be my goat's lard that is doing all that?' and he exclaimed, 'I *never* ate your goat. How can you say such a thing?' But he didn't look at me as he spoke. And I went on, 'No, and I suppose you never touched Verba's Tamarka, or Verba's geese, or smacked your lips over my drakes! Now, have you forgotten what fate I once foretold for you in this very garden? Have you? What did I say would happen to you when the

first snow began to fall?' Oh, that shook him, that shook him—he turned as pale as death. But I went on, all the same, 'And now I say to you once more that the worms will soon have got you. *You* ate my goat, and they are about to eat *you*. It is bound to be, it is bound to be.' For I can tell you that all had come up into my mind again, and I was in no mood to measure my words. 'Besides, I dealt the cards upon you again yesterday, and again you came up as the King of Spades. And that means the end—means I shan't have finished speaking for long before it's all over with you.' 'Well,' says he, 'at least I can't be the King of Spades, for I'm not stout enough'—which shows you that even then he wouldn't own up. And the fact simply drove me out of myself. 'Aye!' I cried. 'Perhaps you're *not* as stout as you used to be, but at least what flesh you had then was put upon you by my lard and my dripping. Oh, you're a blackhearted man, even as you're a blackfaced one—as black as that soil there, as though it were lying upon that black face already!' And he said, 'Then if I'm a dying man—as I am, for that matter—how can you bring yourself to wrong me so?' And I replied, 'Because *you* wronged my orphans, and *they* too maybe will die.' 'Oh, then pardon me!' at last he cried. 'Yet it was less that *I* wronged *them* than that all of us have been wronged.' And upon that my heart gave way for the man, for he had not so much spoken the words as gasped them. And I said, 'Uncle Andrei, *I* may have pardoned you already, but Fate has not. You are dying not because of anything that I have done to bring it about, so that you won't see the end of another day, but because of Fate. . . . Now, I will give you some bread. I shall be giving it you simply out of compassion for one who is about to eat his last meal, and for no other reason. As it happens, I've been baking to-day and have three pounds by me.' And so I cut him off a piece that was still warm, and he clutched, clutched at it, and crossed himself as he did so. And then, as his crossing of himself had pleased me (for it had shown him still to be a Christian and a believer), I gave him a second piece to take home with him, and because, O Passion of Our Lord, the cold and the wind and the whirling snow were so terrible. But he

ate that second piece as he had done the first, and then, being warmed a little, said, 'I've now outstayed my welcome. But you have been very good to me. I shall depart the easier for it.' And he bowed his head. . . . It was long past bedtime. Maybe it was about midnight. After a bit he went on, 'Well, I must be starting now for Odariuk's, and am going to ask Nastasia his widow whether she will let me have his sheepskin coat to wear to the hospital to-morrow morning. Remember that, though once I had means, all my fine things, everything that I had in the place, have since had to go elsewhere and be bartered away.' Then we had our last parting, and I made the sign of the cross after him as he went. That is all."

Uncle Andrei walked through the night to Odariuk's stuccoed abode, and Nastasia agreed to give him a night's lodging in the room in which the dead man was lying, and to let him cover himself over with the dead man's tattered sheepskin.

For how could one go out into the storm again, especially if already frozen in a light suit made of a dead police inspector's chair coverings? So Uncle Andrei stayed where he was—joined Odariuk on the floor of the empty room, once one of the rooms in a boarding-house stripped by Odariuk's own hands. And with neither candle nor nightlight to cheer him Uncle Andrei stretched himself in a corner away from the corpse, arranged his sack to serve him as a pillow and drew the sheepskin over his body. And what the thoughts that passed through his mind as the night wore on no man will ever know. . . . At last the window began to lighten, and Uncle Andrei arose, put on the sheepskin and started for the hospital. But Nastasia saw him just as he started, and saw that he had on him her late husband's coat: wherefore, running after him, she shouted:

"You wretch! Take off that coat again! Here is my Grigori lying dead and you stealing his clothes!"

And she divested Uncle Andrei of the coat and smacked his face with the skirt of it as she did so. And then, standing in the wind on that desolate road beside the ruined almond orchard, she was seen by passers-by to lay the whole

garment furiously about Uncle Andrei's head, whilst he only now and then raised a feeble hand to protect himself.

Nor did he ever reach the hospital, for before he could do so he collapsed against a wall in an untenanted alley near the bazaar and remained sitting there in his thin canvas suit. And when at last some people found him he could do no more than just move his lips. They carried him the rest of the way to the hospital, but he did not last out the morning—he died before midday.

Thus these three men faded away out of life in succession. And their fellows said as they too sat starving and waiting for death:

“It was the stolen cow-meat that had overstrained their guts. And now they’ve turned up their toes.”

CONCLUSION

WHAT is the present month? Is it December, and if so, is it the end of the month or the beginning? For now ends and beginnings alike are all tangled and confused, and even the dried apple which I placed on the verandah to mark the Feast of the Transfiguration has ceased to tell me anything. For example, has Christmas come yet?—As though Christmas could ever come to us *here*! How could *He* ever be born into such a world?!—No, days have for ever lost their meaning.

Yet the days pass, and though the sun hangs low in the heavens and shines but wanly, already there is a hint of spring about—yes, that is so, despite that as yet the light-giver has nothing much except either grey or brown to behold when it arises, and its radiance is sick and sorry and dimmed. And though a new moon is due to-night, one fain asks oneself whither the old, the full one is gone—Well, it too is behind a cloud.

This evening there appeared to me a being come seemingly from the dead, from another world than this, from the world of the departed.

At the time, seated on a hillock, I was gazing across the town in the direction of the burial-ground and trying to solve what the life of the departed could be like. And meanwhile the sun was setting, and as a relentless mocker of the dead gilding the steeple of the burial-ground to a sumptuous gold. I sat straining and straining my eyes in an endeavour inwardly to solve the problem of the dead's ordering of their life until a feeling came to possess me that in very truth the day might come when a miracle would happen. Yet of what nature would the miracle be? Would the heavens open to reveal to us Paradise? Or for that matter did Paradise exist? And from that I turned to a matter more purely personal.

About my neck, I bethought me, I had a little cross, and on a finger a ring. Should I take those things to some Tartar or some Greek who trafficked in gold and offer one or both of them for his acceptance, and then be able to behold with my own eyes of the life of the dead and drain the cup to its ultimate dregs? . . . Yet how could I resign myself and my last mooring to earth, my little house, in this manner, with no more than a final glance of farewell? Would it not be better to brave things out until the spring, and then essay the great ascent to, the great journey across the mountains? Yes that *would* be better, and especially as perhaps it would afford me an opportunity of taking with me some food for distribution among my fellows of the outer world. Stay, though! Had that outer world *need* of food? Was it not possibly able to look after itself?—Oh, that spring were come to fit its golden keys of warm rains and thunder-showers into the portals of the earth's bowels and raise what is dead to life again! . . . So finally I said to myself: "I will await the resurrection of Nature, in that a miracle may happen then and bring about a re-arising of *all* things."

But that horrible burial-ground of the stony, dirty, alien Tartar soil! I knew that dogs were wont to haunt the mortuary in it and rear themselves to peer through its glass window-panes, and that its caretaker was a drunkard. And with the thought I could see again that graveyard imbecile's vacant features. Why, I myself should have to pay him for my hole in the ground by letting him take from me whatsoever he could!—Ah, but I should have nothing for him to take. And the same with both Ivan Mikhailitch and Odariuk.

Then when would the end of all this dying arrive. The end could never arrive, for ends and beginnings of things now stood confounded beyond recall, and even life had ceased to have an end and a beginning. . . .

Y. Yesterday an old man died. He died through being done to death by the scullions of the so-called "Soviet Kitchen," who beat him over the head with their ladles. You see, the old fellow had tried them beyond endurance with his proffered basin, with his distress, with his tremblings. And besides, he

had fairly smelt of ripeness for death! But now he is lying quiet enough, and so will lie until the dawning of another æon. So God rest his soul! An ex-professor, he lies stern of mien, and white of beard, and aquiline of nose, and clad in the official frockcoat carefully kept by him for the occasion—a frockcoat the shoulder-straps of which bear silver stars diffusing rays of light. Well, those stars are not an unfitting symbol, for heaven also has in it silver-embroidered luminaries. The unfortunate circumstance is that to-morrow the ex-professor will pass wholly into the keeping of Kuzma, or Sidor, or whatever the fellow's name is, and that that fellow recognises not stars nor literary repute nor Lomonosov nor Vologdian origin, but only the one thing represented by his right to strip off frockcoats and to roll their late owners into a death pit.

Yes, that burial-ground is a place of alien Tartar soil. . . .

Oh! Was I speaking of my vision from the world of the departed? Yes. As I was sitting in profound reflection on that hillock, suddenly I heard a rustle, a strange, wary sort of rustle behind me, and on turning round beheld a creature come surely from the dead. A lad of eighteen or so he seemed to be, a lad with a large head set on a long, thin neck, and terribly sunken cheeks, and terrified eyes, and whitish lips in a grey face, with the lips pressed tightly against the gums, and bluish, projecting teeth which from their appearance might have been going to seize me, and at all events were joining with two great batlike ears in pulling a sort of laughing grimace.

It was with sheer horror that I gazed upon this apparition from a world of pain. And as I did so he, with teeth still grinning and body rocking to and fro on thin legs as though mounted on castors, hissed at me the almost inaudible words, "Give us something!"

And behind the lad there was a woman. Staggering as though drunken, she had pressed close to her bosom with weary hands a bundle of rags. And even as she stood there she subsided on to the hillock and wailed at me that she and her two children had walked six versts since dawn, that they lived on the other

side of the Black Rocks, and that now they were for the town in the hope of interviewing "the authorities." Often that morning, she added, the party had had to rest upon the way, and two others of her children had died earlier, and the bundle of rags had in it the youngest—and it too was nearing its end.

"Only God brought it about yesterday," she concluded dreamily, abstractedly, as she indicated the lad beside her, "that he was able to knock down a jackdaw."

"Yes—to knock it down with a stone," the youth repeated in the tone almost of one drugged, whilst his teeth still grinned and his eyes still retained their look of terror. And continued the woman:

"When he had done so I said to him, 'You had better have killed those vile wretches.' For, barin, my husband has just become one of those wretches and deserted his family—all because of the wretches' talking and talking and talking—very likely you yourself know what it is. Yet once he belonged to the Intelligentsia and had a place in the postal-service, and kept us comfortably until the day when suddenly he said, 'Oh, the Party for me! What a fool I have been all this while!'"

And the burst of weeping which followed was painful to witness.

"Look," then she went on, "at my Petichka, my last, my own darling, my little three-year-old! See how he has to sleep for very hunger! And do you know, when I awakened him this morning, and said, 'Come, Petichka! To-day we are going to the town for some food,' he cried out, 'No, Mamochka! I only want a drink, for I have been eating lots and lots of meat and fat!' And when I looked at him again I saw that he had actually been gnawing at a bit of charcoal!"

I fled headlong from those poor souls. And when I had reached my ravine again I looked back to see whether they had resumed their journey. But no, they had not. Nor did they for some while afterwards. . . .

Ah, will the rocks ever fall upon and efface us—will the skein ever come to the end of its unwinding? "Unto the mountains they shall say, Fall upon us." But the mountains, I repeat,

will never do that! Yet is not the appointed time come? Yes, it is come and gone. Unfortunately the cup has not been fully drained. . . .

Then a troupe of other strange creatures appears before me. Can they be young girls? To them I shout:

"Who are you, and what are you doing?"

And they flee from me as from a ghost, for I have disturbed them in the act of scraping up dried cow-patties for food! . . .

Then I found myself wondering why the sea was so empty—so quiet, yet also so empty! Where now were the steamships of the countries still possessed of riches and good fame?

Then other folk approached and passed the hillock. And amongst them one man, coming from the direction of Kastel, seemed to be walking with a particularly even and steady tread.

And then a knocking resounded upon my fence. So someone still had need of me? Yet even so what could he want? And as if it was necessary now for anyone to knock before entering!

"Well?" I shouted, and beheld before me a fellow with a merry eye and well-fleshed features. But what, in *these* days, could be the business of a man with features so well-nourished as that?

"You don't recognise me, I see, but I'm the Maxim who used to sell you milk. So the cold hasn't killed you, though everything is rationed now? Well, it's all very well for those 'staff' fellows to do the rationing, but we and the rest have to dance after them like flies on a piece of beef. They've done for every Christian soul in the land."

Then I recognised him as a lusty peasant from a homestead at the foot of Kastel, a Little Russian by birth, who had once been prosperous, but now, possessed only of a solitary cow, made a living by visiting Yiurikha and others and exchanging his milk for goods of theirs, bartering those goods for steppe wheat, and burying the grain in a secret hiding-place. And I knew him to be so cunning a Little Russian as to make it impossible to procure evidence against him, and for the sake of effect he still walked about in rags and shouted with the loudest for the Revolution, whilst the rest of us were perishing like beetles on ice.

"Look at our 'authorities'!" he went on. "See how they've shackled us Orthodox folk! For my own part, I take my cow into the hut every night and sleep with a hatchet and this good cudgel for a pillow.—Oh, have you heard that the Shishkin family have been arrested? I was told so first by Kvedor, a neighbour of the family's and a regular frog of a fellow—he's nearly frightened out of his life about it. And what did the searchers find at the Shishkins' place? Why, they found the Shishkins 'engaged in forging weapons to use against the people'!—So the prisoners were marched away forthwith, and off went Kvedor into a fit of fright and tears. You see, it happened like this. A week ago it was. First a party of armed men arrived on horseback. A 'domiciliary visit'! And as those fellows' job is little better than brigandage, they came with masks in addition to their rifles. And in a trice they had got the place turned inside out, yet found nothing. But wait a bit. Up a 'chimney' in the rock nearby they scuttled. It's the 'chimney' which you and I call 'Chaos,' and one that's been there for thousands of years, ever since some earthquake or another gave the mountain a toss. Well, there you were! *Two* rifles! Aye, and rifles newly cleaned and oiled!—But if the men hadn't already known of the rifles' whereabouts, how came they to discover them so quickly? A-a-ah! For the Devil himself couldn't otherwise have found a rifle either in 'Chaos' or within a verst of it. Well—off with every member of the family!"

Maxim told me his tale as unconcernedly, to judge from appearances, as though he had been speaking of an ordinary occurrence.

And so, poor Boris, you whose one thought had been to put *them* and their doings out of your life, and to be left free to climb into "Chaos" and write stories there—you, my gentle, kindly hearted, happy-minded lad with whom Death had so often thrown a stake, you have at last——!

"So, as I say, Kvedor is terrified and pulling ever such a face about it. Quite early next morning he came to me—he has a cough, you know, and is in galloping consumption—and said, 'It is my intention to go and stand bail for them, and

then they may be released.' Well, they did release the old man and his wife, but they dragged away the two sons to Yalta, where some man or another, I don't quite know who, turned up to put the last shackle upon them. For this man said, according to what Fedar told me afterwards, 'I wish them no harm, but they did try to poison a calf of mine.' And when the fishermen were for putting in a word for Boris in particular the authorities put them off with, 'Nevertheless the prisoners must first be sent to Kharkov for examination.' And to Kharkov they'll go."

Maxim raked my "farmyard" with his eye.

"I don't see your pullets about now?" he queried.

"No—they are gone elsewhere."

"But perhaps you would like to exchange them for some milk?"

"No, I tell you that they are gone elsewhere. Only a short while ago I resigned the last of them into good hands."

"Then what about that turkey-hen of yours?"

"She too is gone elsewhere."

So after another look, which shows him only my shrubs and my stones, Maxim says "Good day!" and departs.

.

"And to Kharkov they'll go"!—Oh, to think of Boris having escaped death so often just to——!

But it *could* not be!

.

The night is black. And what is the date of the night? And the air is still, for the howling wind has fallen. Possibly the wind has fallen because it and its fellows are weary, now that spring is on the way. And the month? Oh, everything is confused, everything is part of a dream.

But is that the wind making the gates rattle? No, it will be *they*, it will be the night-riders! Then where is my hatchet? Surely I have not mislaid it or disposed of it in barter? Well, I must go to meet them anyway, for they are knocking insistently and might enter unadmitted.

Yet the knocking is not a violent knocking. It has in it a note of diffidence. Then it cannot be *they*, after all? Perhaps it is Anuta, "Mamma's little girl"? But it cannot be she either, for she comes hither no longer—she too is gone elsewhere. Then who will it be?

It proves to be an old man, a man tall, spare, eyed like an eagle, hooked like the same. And as he looks at me from under his brows his gaze is essentially the gaze of a hunter. But with that he is grizzled and begrimed, and as he stands on my threshold fumbles at an empty sack with long, thin fingers.

"Pray let me come in," he says. "Just as I was coming along I remembered that you lived near here. You see, I have been to the town to-day and was delayed there, though I have another twelve versts to travel."

Then who can the visitor be? Oh, my memory is all confused!

"I am Shishkin, Boris's father," he volunteers. "Doubtless you remember the lad who used so often to come and see you?"

And throughout he is quiet and business-like—stands there quietly, meditatively fingering his sack. Well, I have no tea for him, but at least he shall be given a morsel of barley bread.

"We ourselves have not much to live upon. In fact a little water is all that I have swallowed since morning, though I have just disposed of three vedra of wine in the town."

As thereafter he sits breaking off and chewing morsels of the bread, he has an air of vaguely considering something. But what that something may be I somehow cannot ask him.

"Yes—in the town," he continues. "Oh, and I heard in the town that Kashin the wine-mixer's son has just been shot, and that the father himself has died of a broken heart. The son was a mere boy, a student, and a fine young fellow at that—one who fought against the Germans, and since had been living here quietly and making himself beloved of all the working-folk. I saw the news posted up on a wall—and stopped to read it. . . . The same thing I saw had been done to my own two lads."

"*Wba-a-at?*"

"To my own two lads." And he makes a gesture. "Yes, I had not learnt of it before to-day, though it happened two weeks ago. 'For brigandage!' My Boris shot—'*for brigandage!*'"

Then he folds his sack into four and sits smoothing it out upon his knee. And now I cannot see his face. . . .

"So," presently he goes on, "there is only my wife, their mother, left in the hut under Kastel. And I shall be seeing her again to-night. Which is why I have first come to see you. . . . *What* am I to tell her? It is a problem, is it not? . . . Two weeks, exactly two weeks ago to-day!—Exactly two weeks!—Boris—'*for brigandage!*' . . . I *cannot* tell her!"

So the night pursues its course. I rise and go outside for a moment and stand looking up at the stars. . . . Then I return to find the old man still smoothing out his sack. . . . And still the night proceeds. Then the old man begins dozing, with his head upon his clenched hands. And he has meanwhile told me all—he need say no more. And so at last—the dawn, with the cracks in the shutters turning blue and the muezzin of daybreak proclaiming God and summoning all to prayer, and giving thanks for the day that is at hand. . . .

"Well, *now* I can go to her." . . .

The almond-tree is in blossom again, and again has thrown over its bare boughs its veil of pale pink. And at the tree's foot are snowdrops of white porcelain, and around the tree, amongst the patches of grass, golden crocuses at once inquisitive and mutually polite, and amongst the bushes violets diffusing a steadily warming scent. Hence spring must be at hand. Is that so? It is. Spring really is coming in.

A blackbird is full of song as he sits perched on the topmost bough of the old pear-tree on the vacant plot. Against the sheen of the heavens he can be picked out as though made of ebony, and even the gleam of his little beak under the setting sun can be distinguished, and the fluttering of his tiny throat. Always he loves to sing alone. First he turns towards

the sea and sings to it. Then he sings to the vineyards, and then to the distances. Spring evenings are times of quietude, but also of sadness, even as is the blackbird's song. Thoughtfully the pink-veiled almond-tree listens to the bird's song as now it serenades the mountains and now the sinking sun and now the vacant plot and now ourselves and now our little dwelling. What a tender, mournful little ditty it is! And as all the wilderness is ours, there is no one to disturb us.

Then the sun disappears behind Babugan, and the mountains turn bluer than ever, and the pale stars come out, and the blackbird, still singing, follows the sun's example. But meanwhile another blackbird has struck up in the spot where the almond-trees were cut down, and the two are celebrating with joint song their springtide. But why so mournfully? Until complete darkness has fallen I stand listening to them.

And now it is full night. The blackbirds are silent for the time being. But at dawn they will begin again. . . . And when they do so I and mine will be listening to them for the last time.

THE END

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